The Secret of the Three Cities

An Introduction to Hindu Śākta Tantrism

Tantra

Douglas Renfrew Brooks

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The goddess Rājarājeśvarī as Prāṇaśakti Devī. Image provided by the Shri Rajarajeswari Peetham of Rochester, New York. Photo courtesy by Adam Epstein.

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Douglas Renfrew Brooks

The University of Chicago Press
Chicago & London

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The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637
The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London
© 1990 by The University of Chicago
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Printed in the United States of America
99 98 97 96 95 94 93 92 91 90 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Brooks, Douglas Renfrew.
The secret of the three cities: an introduction to Hindu Śākta tantrism / Douglas Renfrew Brooks.
p. cm.
Contains the original text and translation of Tripuropaniṣadbhāṣya.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-226-07569-9 (cloth). — ISBN 0-226-07570-2 (paper)
1. Tantrism I. Bhāskararāya, fl. 1675-1751. Tripuropaniṣadbhāṣya. English. 1990. II. Title.
BL1283.84.B76 1990
294.5′514—dc20 90-32874
CIP

∞ *The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.*

tasmai śrīgurave namaḥ

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Preface

Critical studies of Indian culture and religion have only very recently begun to redress a history of serious misunderstandings. The Tantric traditions, which include many of the great pan-Indian movements of esoteric religion, are routinely treated as trivial or tangential to the "mainstreams." This historical pattern of scholarly neglect in earlier times reflected the emotional prejudices of western scholars and their Indian informants. Tantrism, especially in its goddess-centered Hindu formulations, was considered morally suspect and religiously antinomian.[1]

Just as our previously deficient understanding of Christianity has been corrected by considering mysticism and such figures as Meister Eckhart and Saint John of the Cross and our understanding of Judaism has been corrected by the study of Kabbalah and figures such as Isaac Luria, so our understanding of Hinduism will be revised when Tantrism and its key historical figures are given appropriate scholarly attention. Issues and individuals that were once considered bizarre or irrelevant must now be considered essential; without them our understanding is not merely intellectually impoverished but historically negligent.

Goddess-centered or Śākta Tantric traditions are essential for understanding Hinduism. While exoteric Hindu goddess traditions have received increasing attention in recent years, esoteric Tantric forms of goddess worship are rarely mentioned.[2] Tantric Śāktism is usually consigned to the back pages of textbooks and more often than not treated as a mere subsect of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism.[3] The time has come to reclaim the field of Tantric studies, to expand our understanding of the worship of the goddess in India, and to correct our understanding of Hinduism in general.

The Secret of the Three Cities is designed to introduce the concepts and practices of Hindu Śākta Tantrism to an audience with only limited experience in Indian religious studies. It is not a reference book and does not offer elaborate and technical descriptions of Tantric rituals. Rather, it is a textbook that makes an initial purchase on the subject of Śākta Tantrism and engages the reader as an interpreter in the broader comparative study of religion.[4] Tantric tradition, as we shall see, provides a wealth of materials for studies in esotericism, mysticism, ritual, and the concept of sacred text or "scripture."

The book's aim is threefold. First, it seeks to raise the issues of definition and classification in Hindu Tantric studies to a level of primary importance. It begins by addressing the most basic questions: What is Hindu Tantrism? And how shall we go about distinguishing it from other types of Hinduism? The first task is both descriptive and methodological. One can then ask, on what basis does a study of Hindu Tantrism proceed? The book's second aim is to create a methodology for critical study that refocuses attention on *particular* forms of traditional thought and practice. One will then have available a descriptive and methodological basis for studying *other* forms of Tantric and non-Tantric Hinduism. The third aim is to outline the basic patterns of belief and practice that characterize goddess-centered Śākta Tantrism. However, one will not find here a description of the immense variety of goddesses or myriad forms of practice that characterize Śākta Tantrism. Rather, the discussion of theology and practice attempts to draw out the commonalities among Śākta Tantrics by focusing on one particular historical formulation.

My basic premise is that an accurate understanding of catholic Hindu Śākta Tantrism must be derived from an investigation of particular historical instantiations. Previous studies have focused on thematic or literary relations among texts. The result has been to create a general overview of Tantrism that represents no recognizable tradition. The case study approach allows us to retain a place of primary importance for textual exegesis. At the same time, it demonstrates that textual studies must be augmented by historical and anthropological studies. We must avoid creating a thematic tradition of Hindu Tantrism that has never actually existed. Instead, by dealing with a specific Śākta Tantric tradition's theories and practices we may argue inductively to more general conclusions. Further, I avoid those segments of Śākta Tantric tradition that have assimilated their identity into larger Hindu traditions or are, practically speaking, historical "fossils."

Our focus is the Śrīvidyā or cult of the goddess Lalitā Tripurasundarī, arguably the most important and influential formulation of Śākta Tantric identity. Within Śrīvidyā our study centers on the work of one historical interpreter, Bhāskararāya Bhārati or Bhāsurānandanātha, a Ṛg Vedic brahman who flourished between 1728 and 1750 C.E. and traveled widely before settling in Tamil Nadu under the patronage of the Maratha scholar-king Seforji of Tañjavūr.

Further reasons for choosing Śrīvidyā and Bhāskararāya as its key interpreter will be taken up later in detail. Certainly no one familiar with Śākta Tantrism will dispute the importance of either the Śrīvidyā cult or Bhāskararāya. Choosing such a recent figure in the interpretive history of Tantrism for an introductory study, however, deserves explanation. My basic reasons are twofold: first, Bhāskararāya is not only a brilliant interpreter of Śrîvidyā, he is an encyclopedic writer, one who notes earlier interpretations and responds to both general and specific remarks. In his work we see the mature reflections of a thinker who has the wealth of Tantric and Vedic traditions at his fingertips. Second, Bhāskararāya's modern stature enables us to study him as part of a living and continuous tradition of interpretation. He may well be the most significant historical active force in Śākta Tantrism today, especially among South Indian Śrīvidyā adepts. A future study will take up this living tradition of Śākta Tantric theology and practice that links itself directly to the lineages descending from Bhāskararāya.[5]

Studying Hindu Tantrism is as compelling as it is fraught with difficulties. Tantrics consider initiation into their traditions to be a Hindu's highest achievement and the most coveted of all religious options. Tantrism's detractors, on the other hand, castigate it as perversion. However we, as critics, judge Tantrism's ethical or spiritual values, we cannot deny that it has left indelible marks on Indian culture, society, and religion. The characteristic elements of Tantric theology and practice are literally everywhere in India: in temple arts and iconography, in mythology, in rituals public and private, in yoga and alchemical traditions, in medicine, and especially in speculative intellectual traditions and spiritual disciplines (*sādhana*). While it is often difficult to say if Tantrics alone are responsible for specific developments within the larger Hindu tradition, this issue is less consequential than the fact that ideas and practices that collectively characterize Tantrism pervade classical Hinduism.

Tantric sources frequently warn the reader about drawing wrong conclusions and proceeding into study without qualification, oral instruction, and personal religious commitment.

> The fool who, overpowered by greed, acts after having looked up [the matter] in a written book without having obtained it from the guru's mouth, he also will certainly be destroyed.[6]

Scholars, it seems, have well heeded this advice. The methodological difficulties involved in studying the relationship between written and oral Tantric traditions, however, must not prevent us from venturing into the field: Tantrism is simply too important for our understanding of Hinduism for us to ignore.

It would be an error to consider Tantrism apart from its complex interrelations with non-Tantric traditions. Literary history demonstrates that Vedic-oriented brahmans have been involved in Śākta Tantrism from its incipient stages of development, that is, from at least the sixth century.[7] While Śākta Tantrism may have originated in autochthonous, pre-Aryan goddess cults, any attempt to distance Śākta Tantrism from the Sanskritic Hindu traditions dominated by brahman intellectuals will lead us astray. Rather, we must begin the extremely complex task of defining and classifying Tantric texts and tradition from within the "mainstreams" of brāhmaṇical Hinduism. This will require a method by which we can distinguish Tantric from the non-Tantric Hinduism.[8]

In Part One we will build on the work of others to create a method for defining and classifying Hindu Tantrism. Utilizing some of the fine descriptive studies of Tantrism by scholars such as Padoux, Goudriaan, Gupta, and Dwiveda, I will introduce comparative methods, principally those utilized by Jonathan Z. Smith, to define and classify phenomena within Judaism.[9] In addition, significant new materials for the study of Śākta Tantrism are also introduced.

Part Two presents, for the first time, an annotated translation of Bhāskararāya's commentary (*bhāṣya*) on the *Tripurā Upaniṣad*. This short work of the Śrīvidyā school of Śākta Tantrism is one of a small number of texts that claims an explicit Vedic origin and yet is wholly Tantric in content. By calling itself a "Upaniṣad" and making an implicit claim as Vedic revelation (*śruti*), *Tripurā Upaniṣad* offers an excellent case for studying the way "conservative" Tantrics locate themselves in the "mainstreams" of Hindu "orthodoxy." The Śrividyā school and its texts present Tantric theology and theories of practice that emanate primarily from high-caste brahmans with clear allegiances to Vedic "orthodoxy."[10] While these texts and traditions can be clearly contrasted with explicitly anti-Vedic, anti-brāhmaṇical strands of Tantric tradition, it would be an error to think that one could somehow extricate "pure" Tantrism from its "tainted" brāhmaṇical interpretations.[11] There is no primordial Tantrism, only historical appropriations of it; virtually all Śākta Tantrism that appears in Sanskrit has been dominated by brahmans.

The Śrīvidyā school is also one of Śākta Tantrism's most influential and theologically sophisticated movements. Its central image, the *śrīcakra,* is probably the most famous visual image in all of Hindu Tantric tradition. Its literature and practice is perhaps more systematic than any other Śākta sect. Bhāskararāya, generally regarded to be the foremost intellectual authority among the adherents of the Śrīvidyā system, is more than a scholar of Tantrism.[12] Like many great Indian intellectuals, he demonstrates a formidable mastery of such diverse and complex fields as grammar (*vyākaraṇa*), ritual interpretation (*mīmāṃsā*), and logic (*nyāya*), and has written on these and other non-Tantric subjects. Among his eighteen extant works, the commentaries on three sectarian Śākta Upaniṣads—the *Kaula, Bhāvana,* and *Tripurā Upaniṣads*—represent his mature theological reflections.[13] While the historical origins of the primary texts are ambiguous and their influence on early Śākta Tantrism dubious, Bhāskararāya offers insight into historical Śrīvidyā as well as intellectually compelling theological arguments.

Using the Śākta Tantric Upaniṣads' fruitful ambiguities to his interpretive advantage, Bhāskararāya leads the reader directly into Tantrism's most thorny and complex issues. *Tripurā Upaniṣad,* in particular, presents Bhāskararāya with a rare opportunity. Because the text is both concise and extremely elliptical, he is able to summarize his own views on contemplative worship (*upāsana*) and interpret its underlying themes to suit his sectarianism. Unconstrained by the technicalities or polemics that often characterize other Śākta Tantric sources, Bhāskararāya raises both directly and implicitly those subjects he deems essential to an understanding of Tantrism. Further, *Tripurā Upaniṣad* presents no innovations or creative developments of Tantric theory or practice. Rather, it offers a summary of established views. The text in its *content* is as close to an introduction to Śākta Tantrism as we may find. More important, however, is that the text in *form* is not a Tantra but a Upaniṣad that boldly claims to be Vedic revelation (*śruti*). The Upaniṣad's combination of Tantric content and Vedic form compels Bhāskararāya, and the student of Hinduism, to explain Śākta Tantrism not as a phenomenon apart from or peripheral to "orthodox" Hinduism but rather as a development within it.

Bhāskararāya, like all Śrīvidyā proponents, is committed to brāhmaṇical Hindu "orthodoxy." However, unlike some adepts, he is also an uncompromising proponent of the Tantric tradition's most controversial concepts and practices.

Śrīvidyā, literally "the knowledge of [the goddess] Śrī," or "Auspicious Knowledge," represents the most conservative element in Śākta Tantrism. It proponents, steeped in brāhmaṇical traditions, are usually at pains to develop congenial relations with exoteric Hinduism. These conservative interpretations, however, do not always meet orthodox expectations. Bhāskararāya, for example, must have known that by identifying himself with the so-called Kaula (or "left-practice" [*vāmācara*]) elements in Tantric tradition he would immediately cross into territory that most "orthodox" high-caste Hindus reject as antinomian and thoroughly contrary to the values and practices of the Veda. Yet he does not hesitate to introduce into his interpretations of Śrīvidyā the most controversial of Kaula principles, such as the use of the controversial five m's (*pañcamakāra:* wine [*madya*], meat [*māṃsa*], fish [*matsya*], fermented grains [*mudrā*], and sexual intercourse [*maithuna*]).[14] He also undoubtedly knew that others, who represent more conservative elements within Śrīvidyā, openly opposed Kaula practices. According to Śrīvidyā's so-called Samaya faction, Kaula interpretations violate both the ethical and religious precepts of traditional Hindu law (*dharma*). Yet one finds no apologetic on Bhāskararāya's part and no indication that he believed himself or other Kaula-oriented Tantrics to be indulging in reprehensible behavior. Maintaining the view shared by the majority of Śākta Tantrics, Bhāskararāya repeatedly says that Kaula elements are essential to the practice of Tantric ritual. While he admits that Kaula practices are controversial, ethically suspect, and liable to misunderstanding, he insists on their secret practice. Bhāskararāya argues that without the Kaula practices, which strike at the heart of Hindu religious and social convention, the Tantric loses his ability to transcend the ordinary and mundane.

Advocating positions that are characteristic of catholic Śākta Tantrism and yet at odds with the normative values of brāhmaṇism, Bhāskararāya sees himself in two roles. While publicly he views himself as an orthodox Vaidika who upholds conventional brāhmaṇism, privately he assumes the position of a Tantric adept who seemingly undermines the very conventions he outwardly supports. As we shall see, he does not consider these two roles contradictory.

Bhāskararāya's remarkable success as a Vaidika Tantric is measured not only by his ability to articulate this "dual norm" but by his historical legacy. History has treated him both as a respected member of brahman society and as a steadfast advocate of the most radical ideas of Kaula Tantrism. Even among contemporary Śrīvidyā adepts in South India who reject Kaulism, Bhāskararāya is regarded as authoritative on many issues. In his own view, there is no direct confrontation between Vedic and Tantric norms: the Tantric way, and especially Śrīvidyā, he believes is the most sublime expression of the Vedic legacy.

For the student of Hindu Tantrism, a study of Bhāskararāya's Śrīvidyā interpretations present an extraordinary opportunity to investigate both Tantrism's relationship with the "Vedic" legacy and the essentials of Tantric theory and practice. We must notice, however, that Śrīvidyā, like other Tantric traditions, has been anything but unified. Controversy continues to surround the Kaula elements within the Śrīvidyā school and the proper interpretation of its teachings. Contemporary Tantric scholars who favor the fiercely puritanical interpretations of Śrīvidyā that Bhāskararāya rejects often express their uneasiness over the "unseemly" elements in many otherwise "reputable" and "wholesome" Tantric sources.[15]

The text under consideration here, the *Tripurā Upaniṣad*, is thoroughly committed to Kaula Tantrism, which is perhaps reason enough to view its contents as representative of the majority of sources in catholic Hindu Tantrism. While the Upaniṣad's antiquity and "authenticity" as Vedic revelation are disputed, the fact is that Bhāskararāya and other commentators—Tantric and non-Tantric—deal with it *as if* it were Vedic revelation. Thus, Hindu traditionalists raise important questions: In what sense is this Upaniṣad a Vedic text despite its Tantric contents? Can it be both Vedic and Tantric? Some commentators, like Bhāskararāya, will claim it is both Vedic and Tantric, while others, such as Upaniṣadbrahmayogin, take seriously its place in the canon of Vedic revelation but reject its Kaula Tantric elements as interpolation. We should note that these arguments never take up the issue of the historical or chronological position of the Upaniṣad. While Western scholars sometimes claim that these chronologically late Upaniṣads do not represent Vedic traditions, Hindu commentators, for the most part, assume just the opposite position. We will take seriously the claims of those within the Hindu tradition who interpret *Tripurā Upaniṣad* as a Vedic (and sometimes Tantric) text and investigate the reasons why other Hindus reject it both in form and in content. Critically speaking, the actual age of the text is a relatively unimportant factor for understanding the Tantrics and non-Tantrics who grapple with the issue of the Upaniṣad's Tantric contents and its claim to be authoritative Vedic revelation (*śruti*). In short, we must dispel the too often stated view that Tantrism is a "non-Vedic" or, even worse, anti-Vedic religion. Bhāskararāya presents an instance in which "mainstream" exoteric Vedic traditions intersect with the most "radical" and controversial traditions of esoteric Tantrism.

For many non-Tantric Hindu "orthodox," the term "Tantric Upaniṣad" is an oxymoron that warrants no serious investigation. As historians of religion, rather than Hindu theologians, we must deal the claims of its proponents and detractors and its seemingly "antinomian" Tantric contents.

In the space of only sixteen verses *Tripurā Upaniṣad* raises nearly every topic of importance in catholic Śākta Tantrism. Further, Bhāskararāya is rarely diverted into the technicalities that characterize Tantric writings. However, Bhāskararāya's own interpretations are often in need of further clarification. The translation of his commentary (*bhāṣya*) on *Tripurā Upaniṣad* proceeds from the supposition that rendering the text into English must involve input from contemporary oral traditions.[16]

Tantric esotericism *requires* the translator to take seriously the insights of living adepts. That is, if one aims to produce a version of the text that represents an instantiated tradition of interpretation. Literal translations without the benefit of input from living Tantrics may, in fact, bear no relation to a given text as it has been interpreted historically. We may misrepresent and misunderstand Tantrism if we ignore the seminal role oral interpretation has played in the transmission of tradition. While this approach will lead to different versions (and therefore different translations) of the text, it is perhaps the only way to touch the pulse of Tantrism. The reader need only compare A. G. Krishna Warrier's translation of the root-text (*mūla*) of *Tripurā Upaniṣad*—a version he bases "mainly on the commentary of Upaniṣadbrahmayogin"—to see the possible differences in wording and sense that can arise.

The working principles for the present translation are those M. David Eckel has recently proposed. He writes:

> For a translation to be *accurate* (as opposed to literal) it has to produce an effect on the reader that is similar to the effect it would have produced on an informed reader in the original language. If the original is meant to be obscure, the translation should be obscure. If the original is meant to be clear, the translation should be clear. The problem for the translator is that clarity in one language is not necessarily clarity in another.[17]

To this we should add that "obscure" is not the same as an "esoteric." Thus, unlike the obscure and epigrammatic language of Jñānagarbha, the eighth-century Buddhist philosopher who Eckel so ably renders into English, the esoteric language of a Hindu Tantric text is *designed* to prevent the uninitiated from gaining entry into its meanings. It is not merely that the concepts are difficult to grasp or that the language is technical. Unlike exoteric philosophical texts, Tantric texts are not difficult merely because they assume that the reader is conversant with certain intellectual issues or commands a specialized vocabulary. Rather, Tantrics encode concepts, omit crucial interpretive elements, and deliberately stanch the uninvited from entering into traditional secrets. Further, Tantrics eschew polemics; they engage in little or no public debate and limit participation to those they determine specially qualified (*adhikārin*) for its teachings. Intellectual abilities alone will not suffice for the interpretation of Tantric sources. The translator will require more than philological ability and a vivid imagination: one must gain access to traditional interpreters and develop a critical appreciation of their input.

In Part One the reader is prepared, as it were, for the difficult task of reading a Tantric text and interpreting Tantric traditions in their historical contexts. I have avoided a purely narrative approach and instead have concentrated on framing Tantrism in the context of problems that surround its history, its transmission, and its most controversial teachings. The Introduction addresses the study's overall aims and methods in order to justify a basic supposition: an understanding of what Hindu Tantrism is depends on how and, to some extent, by whom it is investigated.

The discussion of definition and classification of Tantrism in Chapter 1 will alter not only *how* we study Tantrism but *what* we understand it to be. Like the terms "Vedism" and "Hinduism," we shall see that Tantrism is a category created out of the scholarly imagination designed to represent to us a distinctive type of Indian religion. This is not to reduce Tantrism to a scholarly fiction. Our aim is to consider it from the perspective of the historian of religion rather than from the standpoint of the Tantric theologian. We must identify "Tantric" phenomena, probe critically what Tantrics say about themselves, and attempt to explain why they say it.

Chapter 2 is deliberately brief and provides an opportunity to reflect upon crucial methodological issues in the study of Tantric (and, more broadly, esoteric) texts. Here the relationship between oral and written traditions and the notion of "sacred text" or "scripture" as a relational category is raised with comparative objectives in mind. We can then begin to explore more deeply the role of texts in Tantric traditions and, in the Conclusion, ask what lies beyond their interpretation. Since the text under study is both a primary source (i.e., a *mūla* or root-text) with a historical commentary and an important resource for living Śrīvidyā traditions, we shall confront head-on difficult problems in translation, interpretation, and meaning.

In Chapter 3 we will consider briefly both Śrīvidyā as a major school of Śākta Tantrism and the *Tripurā Upaniṣad* as a source for our general understanding of Tantric theology and practice. We shall concentrate on the structure and thematic content of the text, as well as on Bhāskararāya's specific interpretation. Chapter 3 begins by proposing operative definitions of Tantrism and Śāktism based on recent scholarship and develops a method for distinguishing the Tantric from the non-Tantric. Only cursory attention is given to specific comparisons of Tantric and non-Tantric views—an extremely complex task best left out of an introductory study. The relationship of the Śāṅkara traditions of non-dualistic Vedānta to Śrīvidyā are discussed only briefly and as they arise in the contexts of our textual study.[18]

The overall aim in Part One is to provide an introduction to Hindu Śākta Tantrism that enables the student to understand and interpret the concepts discussed in texts and commentaries. Part Two then presents a case text that raises some of Tantrism's most intellectually compelling and challenging subjects.

Acknowledgments

This work would not have been possible without Dr. G. Sundaramoorthy, head of the Department of Sanskrit, Madurai-Kamaraj University, Tamil Nadu. This remarkable scholar, like the great Abhinavagupta and Bhāskararāya, is among those very few who in a given generation master every aspect of Vedic and Hindu traditions. I hesitate to call this a collaboration only for fear that he would bear any criticism it may receive.

Gary Tubb painstakingly reviewed my translation of *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya* and spared me many errors slight and imposing. My indebtedness to him and his specific contributions to the translation are further acknowledged in the Notes. To my colleague at the University of Rochester, Dean Miller, who read the manuscript and offered many suggestions for its improvement, I am grateful. Thomas B. Coburn gave critical advice and graciously shared with me his scholarship; his efforts, especially in the final stages of the book's preparation, have improved it immeasurably.

I must also thank the undergraduates at the University of Rochester who first read this book in manuscript during the spring of 1988 and contributed to making it more useful for others to study. Greg Goode and Bob Taylor of the university's Computer Services must be thanked for their expertise in the production of the final manuscript.

I am grateful to my colleagues in the Department of Religion and Classics, present and past, for their seemingly endless goodwill and support, especially Alfred Geier, Abraham Karp, Joseph Brennan, Edward Wierenga, C. Clifton Black, Christine Kalkavadge, and Deborah Lyons.

Last, I should like to express my special gratitude to two mentors and professional colleagues whose insights and friendship help sustain me. During the past ten years Malcolm David Eckel has been my most constant source of advice and constructive criticism; his friendship remains an invaluable resource and his scholarship a model of excellence. More recently, I have been privileged by the company of my department's chairman and founder, William Scott Green, whose breadth of scholarship and restless intellect inspires and advances my understanding of religion.

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PART ONE

Hindu Śākta Tantrism

Introduction

Texts calling themselves "Tantras" begin to appear in written Sanskrit around the ninth century C.E. This emerging body of literature presents the mature reflections of a broad-based, unsystematic, and diffuse body of traditions. While we can be certain that the diverse elements we identify as "Tantric" precede efforts to collect and codify them in written forms, we cannot yet determine if the Tantric ideology originates in traditions outside the Aryan Vedic fold.

The seeds from which Tantrism grew were sown centuries before we are able to identify specific texts or traditions. Yoga and wisdom traditions, shamanism, alchemy, and folklore all contribute elements to the development of Tantric tradition. The individuals who were involved in these movements may also have had a hand in formulating religious ideas involving eroticism and asceticism, as well as some role in the formation of sophisticated types of ritual worship involving goddess figures. These diverse phenomena are then "sanskritized," that is, they are assimilated and elaborated upon later by Vedic-oriented brahmans. Despite efforts by those who object to Tantrism on moral, intellectual, or political grounds, Tantric traditions flourish in India's fecund cultural environment.

By the eleventh century, the diverse phenomena that characterize Tantric theory and practice begin to have profound and observable affects on "mainstream" Hinduism. The concepts and practices of Tantric yoga, in particular, gain popularity and influence the works of non-Tantric writers. Tantric adherents come from virtually all strata of Indian society; they are involved in everything from orgiastic rites and the practice of yogas that promise superhuman power to intelletual discussions involving elaborate ritual symbolism. While some Tantrics believe their practice provides the adept with the means to acquire material or erotic goals, others see it as a method for achieving bodily immortality; still others understand Tantric teaching as the key to liberation-while-embodied (*jīvanmukti*) or to the realization of God. All Tantrics, however, maintain the common belief that their specific forms of practice (*sādhana*) empower them to attain whatever they desire—material or spiritual.

Tantric aspirations are not only articulated into doctrines and practices that make religious claims. Tantric teachings must also be understood within social and historical contexts that locate them within a larger system of beliefs. The Tantric's claim to religious empowerment is a claim to certain intellectual and spiritual privileges as well as forms of social status.

As a religious virtuosi, the Tantric practitioner charts waters that for most remain unexplored and dangerous. Yet Tantrics do not pose themselves as seekers of the unknown but rather, like other Hindus, as those who see truth as recovered rather than discovered.[1] It is in the methods they espouse to "re-cognize" (*pratyabhijñā*) an eternal truth, which they believe was originally revealed in the Veda, that Tantrics distinguish themselves. Tantrics so thoroughly assimilate and synthesize earlier Indian traditions, their innovations become difficult to identify. We must not, however, eschew the difficult tasks of definition and classification if we are to distinguish "Tantric" phenomena.

Teun Goudriaan begins his fine study of Hindu Tantric and Śākta literature with the "self-evident" fact that the texts to be considered should not be limited merely to those calling themselves "Tantras" but to those texts that proclaim Tantric doctrines.[2] Tantric texts, he goes on to say, develop an identity by elaborating a complex and diffuse mosaic of concepts, doctrines, and ritual practices. These catholic and denominational "Tantric elements" evidenced in texts are manifest in the different religions, sects, and schools that represent Tantrism's various forms of spiritual discipline (*sādhana*). Thus, speaking of the "Tantras" as if they represent a homogeneous body of thought can be extremely misleading.

Tantric literature, like Tantric tradition, represents itself in a variety of ways. The present study focuses on the literary Tantric tradition that is rooted in Sanskrit sources, developed among those with an essentially sympathetic attitude toward brāhmaṇical orthodoxy, and espoused by living Tantrics with close religious, social, and historical ties to Vedic traditions. These Tantrics are called here "Vaidika Tantrics," that is, Tantrics who identify themselves as part of the coherent and continuous legacy of Vedic tradition. They stand in contrast to those Hindu Tantrics who openly disdain Vedic traditions and especially the predominant position of brahmans in the interpretative process. While it is true that influential streams within Hindu Tantrism are not represented in this typology, the catholic definition presented here does provide a working paradigm for the majority of sects that develop a Sanskrit-based form of Tantric Śāktism. Since literary and historical materials offer only one set of sources for introductory study, this study provides a textual model for more specific anthropological investigations.

Tantrics can be identified through ideas and ritual practices propounded in a canon of identifiable texts. However, as we shall see, Tantrism is not any one particular characteristic or property of texts or traditions.

The term "Tantra" is useful for developing a definition of the whole phenomenon only when understood metaphorically. Literally in Sanskrit a "loom" or the warp of threads extended lengthwise on a loom, "Tantras" weave together concepts and prescriptions for action to create distinctive, synthetic types of spiritual discipline (*sādhana*). Often etymologized by reference to the verbal roots *tan-,* "to stretch, expound," and *tra-,* "to save," the Tantras expand the possibilities for human liberation and empowerment in the increasingly degenerate Kali age.[3] The term is most frequently used by Hindus to designate a body of literature, thought, and practice distinguished in a variety of ways from Vedic traditions. In the broadest sense, "Tantras" are not merely the texts that go by that name but rather are literary sources that contain Tantric ideas. While this juxtaposes "Vedic" and "Tantric" traditions, it would be wrong to suggest that Hindu Tantrics necessarily characterize their discipline as *opposing* the notion of "Veda" in the sense of its being the ultimate source of all truth. We must distinguish further what is meant by the terms "Veda" and "Tantra" if we are to grasp their relationship.

To further complicate the definitional issue, the word "Tantra" in contemporary vernacular Indian languages, such as Tamil or Hindi, is frequently used to conjure notions of effective black magic, illicit sexuality, and immoral behavior. It is also clear, however, that Tantrics are considered "powerful" people. Recently, a popular movement in modern India links the cure of "sexual problems" experienced by married couples to specialists who openly call themselves "Tantrics." Thus, the terms "Tantra" and "Tantric" gain a more positive set of connotations but retain their popular associations with eroticism, alchemy, and magic. The multiple meanings of the term and its historical usages present a complex set of interpretive problems. There is no way, it seems, we can escape the fact that the term "Tantra" is charged with emotional power and controversy.

For purposes of definition "Tantra" is best interpreted in relation to other terms or categories that arise in Indian tradition. The term's significance is found not in its etymological or metaphorical meanings, nor in reference to a unique defining quality or characteristic. Rather, Tantra—and Tantrism, the abstract noun created by scholars to refer to Tantric texts and traditions—is defined most accurately by developing an understanding of oppositional social, political, and religious relations and structures. The key to definition is the formulation of a method by which we can identify Tantric characteristics while, at the same time, provisionally distinguish the Tantric from the non-Tantric. The generic attributes that define Tantrism are, in their historical contexts, part of a larger network of social and religious relations in India.

As a broad historical movement Tantrism is not only a Hindu phenomenon but appears in all three major indigenous traditions in India: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Our presently limited body of data suggests, however, that the relations between Tantrics of different religions have not significantly affected the development of their respective ideologies and practices. In the broadest sense, Tantrism as a religious phenomenon should be understood by identifying shared patterns of belief and types of behavior rather than by efforts to link together doctrinal systems, which are often dramatically different in their specific formulations.

Within Hinduism "Tantric elements" are essential to the definition of several major sectarian traditions that are not goddess oriented, including most of the schools of Kashmiri Śaivism and Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavism. But nowhere are these Tantric elements more clearly in evidence than in the multifarious traditions of goddess-centered worship that are generally classified under the term "Śāktism."[4]

Our study of Hindu Śākta Tantrism begins with a recognition of commonalities in thought and practice across doctrinal lines. This is essential for developing a concising definition. Specific sectarian formulations culled from texts and living Tantrics bring the scholar closer to traditions as they are actually interpreted and practiced—and also prevent us from creating our own scholarly fictions. However straightforward and unambiguous the textual study of Tantric elements seems, it is predicated on the supposition that the student already has intellectual access to technical, obscure, and esoteric Tantric language. More important, the majority of Tantrics weigh oral traditions and the instructions of their gurus more heavily than written sources and thus undermine a complete reliance on literary traditions. Oral teachings may sublate or subordinate textual instructions, as is often the case among the contemporary followers of the Śrīvidyā school in South India.[5]

Since Tantrics maintain a vigilant guard over the secret, oral meanings of texts, the scholar's access to tradition is limited to those living Tantrics willing to discuss openly Tantric concepts and practices.

Textual studies taken apart from living traditions may prove valuable for literary comparison but remain limited resources for religious studies. Simply because a Tantric text, or a group of texts, propound a given interpretation or describe similarly a ritual practice, one cannot assert that the text instantiates actual traditions. Many Tantric texts, it seems, were not written to be performed but for other reasons.[6] We must limit our textual studies then to those works discussed by particular Tantric writers who, we may assume, represent a given lineage. Further, Tantric texts with similar themes do not necessarily gather together around specific traditional lineages of interpretation. Precisely how lineages determine their canons is a subject for future study. The point to emphasize here is that a purely textual reconstruction of Tantric practices, as Goudriaan astutely notes, is liable to misrepresent both historical and living traditions.[7]

Since Tantric traditions are most thoroughly understood when both written and oral sources are taken into account, the scholar must deal with three important and interrelated methodological problems. First, one must gain intellectual access to the basic vocabulary and concepts in Tantric sources. Even this rudimentary level of understanding is nearly impossible to achieve without first-hand instruction by someone who already knows the technical and esoteric meanings of words. An accurate reading of Tantric sources leaves us with only a preliminary understanding of what given texts *say.*[8] Textual translations and studies that do not view Tantrism's historical landscape through a window of oral interpretation are incapable of distinguishing the literal meaning of a text from its understanding within Tantric lineages. What Tantric texts *say,* what Tantrics *say they do,* and what they *actually do* are not necessarily the same. We must not only learn to read Tantric texts and gain the confidence of Tantrics who will discuss their traditions, we must be able to criticize their interpretations and observe their practices for ourselves.

The second methodological problem is now more apparent. To go beyond a literary and speculative understanding of Tantrism and to probe a text's meanings, one must gain broad access to the secret and initiated lines of oral interpretation of which a given text is a part. Leaving aside for the moment the practical difficulties of obtaining access to secret teachings and the ethics of reporting one's findings, one must deal with the difficult question of the scholar as an intermediary whose own understanding and finite access to the oral sources represents but one limited interpretation. How insightful and accurate can a study be if the picture drawn of the whole tradition is necessarily limited by the scholar's view of an oral tradition known only partially? At best, each study is limited by the scholar's own access to living, oral sources for interpretation. This human element leads us to our third methodological problem.

The scholar must create a method by which he or she can assess critically the relationship of oral tradition to the text under study. On what basis does the scholar decide which textual materials are relevant and representative of a particular sectarian tradition? At stake are not only the methods for a scholarly appraisal of Tantrism. Clarifying the scholar's methodological stance is crucial not only for developing an understanding of Hindu Tantrism but for addressing a much broader question in religious studies. How should the study of esoteric and secret traditions proceed? While I do not presume to answer to this larger question, the present case raises the issue to a position of central importance for comparative studies of religion.

The present study first locates the *Tripurā Upaniṣad* and Bhāskararāya's commentary in the literary and historical traditions of the Śrīvidyā school. We can then investigate why this text is considered both "Tantric" and "Vedic." The issues of definition and classification compel us to reassess familiar genres of Hindu religious literature and reevaluate Tantrism as an intellectual and religious movement. "Historical" Tantrics—specifically, those who write commentaries or compose other works in Sanskrit that espouse Tantric teachings—are contrasted here with "contemporary" adepts, whose input is limited almost entirely to oral interpretations.

I shall leave aside here a discussion of the systems of traditional classification proffered within Tantric sources. While these terms were developed to distinguish various types of practices, to set apart traditions according to geographical divisions, and to clarify theological differences, they are generally both unhelpful and confusing.[9] Instead, we shall concentrate more carefully on the terms "Veda" and "Tantra."[10] Our thesis is that "Tantrism" is best understood in relation to other, more familiar currents of Hindu thought and practice.

Before I proceed further, a note is in order concerning *Tripurā Upaniṣad* and Bhāskararāya's commentary as a point of departure for an introduction to Hindu Tantrism. Why focus on this particular text and commentary when it represents but one deeply intellectual, highly Sanskritic, and "conservative" branch of Śākta Tantrism?

A text-centered introduction to Tantrism may be justified in three ways. First, a text of the Śrīvidyā school allows us to consider two essential aspects of Tantrism: its specific and technical sectarianism and its general, catholic traditionalism. Śrīvidyā presents an opportunity to describe some of the nuances of Tantric theology and practice while, at the same time, it allows us to delve into the relationship between Vedic and Tantric traditions. Further, Śrīvidyā does not hesitate to draw on the intellectual capital of catholic Tantrism to support its own sectarianism. For example, Śrīvidyā writers refer to themselves as "Kaulas" or "Kaulikas" but do not present Kaula tradition as a sectarian formulation of Tantrism, as do certain Kashmiri Śaiva Tantrics. Rather, the term "Kaula" signifies a movement with general characteristics that all Kaula Tantrics share.

Thus, Śrīvidyā is catholic in the intellectual sense and geographically a pan-Indian phenomenon. The student of Tantrism would be hard pressed to find another form of Tantric tradition that is as influential as Śrīvidyā that is not essentially regional in appeal.[11]

The second virtue of a text-centered introduction to the subject proceeds from the view that Tantrism is best studied not as a collection of texts, concepts, or practices related merely by common themes or sectarian affiliations. Rather, Hindu Tantrism because of its sectarian diversity is best seen as a set of intersecting lineage traditions forming a broader tradition. The locus of Tantric tradition is the lineage (*paramparā*), representing the interpretation of a particular (and sometimes unique) form of practice within a line of traditional transmission (*sampradāya*). Since each lineage is empowered by its continuity and relationship with a succession of teachers or gurus, the historical or contemporary adept represents but one link in a chain that is ostensively traced to a divine source. Most Śākta Tantras and Śaiva Āgamas are attributed to the god Śiva, usually in the form of Bhairava, or to another quasi-divine figure. Tantric gurus, in turn, are identified by their disciples as living embodiments of that divine form. Studying but one text with commentary insures that we do, in fact, intersect with the lineage teaching of a Tantric guru. We need only assume that the commentator's written interpretations represent some portion of his lineage's traditions. These written comments might themselves be so obscure or esoteric that they require further oral interpretation. This is an issue we must also consider. While this case-study method of texts denies us a broad overview of the Tantric canon, our insights are at least representative of one version of Tantric tradition—they are not merely a scholarly concoction.

Tantrics develop their views from the teachings they receive within initiated oral lineage traditions *and* from the texts these traditions accept, admit, and transmit in both oral and written forms.[12] By collecting sources selectively from a corpus of literature that extends far beyond the ability or purview of most gurus or lineages to review, Tantrics expand their knowledge, develop their practices, and grow in understanding of themselves and others.[13] There is no *a priori* means for determining if a "collective view" of Tantrism based on a synthesis of similar textual views and discussions represents a *religious* and *scriptural* tradition.[14]

Our general observations, however, need not be construed as applying to only one peculiar lineage tradition's interpretations. While Tantrics are rooted in sectarian lineages, they share beliefs and engage in rituals that are strikingly similar. The point is that the method by which we draw broad conclusions about catholic Hindu Tantrism should be inductive, that is, moving from particular forms of interpretation and practice to more general observations.

The third reason to introduce Hindu Tantrism through a text such as the *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya* is this particular text's remarkable range of topics, all of which are of central concern to the catholic tradition. Few Tantric texts provide so much information in so limited a space on as many essential topics and certainly no other source of comparable size within the influential Śrīvidyā school. *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya* takes us straight to the heart of Tantrism. Unlike other texts committed principally to speculative and theological exposition and still others more overtly ritualistic, this text exemplifies Tantrism's central dictum: theory and practice must never be divorced from one another.[15] Despite the root-text's capricious shifts from topic to topic, Bhāskararāya's commentary creates an interpretive cohesion. Perhaps the Upaniṣad's lack of a single thematic focus deters him from his characteristic technical plunges into Tantrism's murky depths. The net effect is that Bhāskararāya's erudition is directed toward seeing the text as a whole, his commitment to conceptual coherence allowing us inside this text in a way his other works deny to all but the most avid and learned Śrīvidyā adept.

Though the *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya* is hardly an introductory text, it may be as close as any Tantric work with written commentary comes to that designation. Bhāskararāya assumes his audience is limited to initiated adepts already well-versed in the nuances and meanings of the text. He also assumes the reader is familiar with his other works, and he makes clear at its outset that this commentary can be treated as a cogent summary of his own views. Further, since there is nothing in *Tripurā Upaniṣad* that is not present elsewhere in the Tantric canon, Bhāskararāya uses this opportunity to reaffirm the relationship between Tantric and Vedic ritual and interpretation.

Since Tantric spiritual discipline (*sādhana*) is grounded in specific teachings and formulated in sectarian settings, issues crucial to the Śrīvidyā school are central topics of Bhāskararāya's discussion. In short, *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya* offers us a look into the mind of a great Tantric thinker whose views on key issues more often than not represent the majority within Sanskrit-based Śākta Tantric traditions.[16] However, to understand Hindu Tantrism we must cultivate eyes to see it and recognize that, however imperfect our access and insight, its place in the history of Indian religions is secure beyond our personal reactions or curiosities.

1 Locating the Text and Tradition

Locating the *Tripurā Upaniṣad:* Veda or Tantra?

The historical origins of the *Tripurā Upaniṣad,* like those of goddess-centered Śāktism and Tantrism, are recondite. As we "locate" this text in the Tantric canon of Hindu tradition we will concentrate on the issue of its origins. Such an investigation, however, does not center on the text's historical beginnings, though historical factors are not entirely insignificant. The date of the text is not likely to be resolved until more evidence is available; and even if the historical beginning of the text were known, this information would not necessarily advance our understanding of its place in Hindu traditions. Rather, we shall examine *Tripurā Upaniṣad's* origin by posing two questions: (1) Why is this Tantric text designated an "Upaniṣad?" And (2) how does this designation affect its treatment? An assessment of the Upaniṣad as a Śākta Tantric source making a tacit claim to Vedic status will lead us directly into the discussion of Tantrism as a classification within Hinduism.

What little we do know about *Tripurā Upaniṣad's* history can be quickly dispatched. Texts bearing "Upaniṣad" as part of their title continue to be written well into recent modern times with increasing attention given to sectarian concerns.[1] Affixing a date to many of these sectarian texts, however, is problematic. Farquhar's conclusion that a "half dozen" Śākta Upaniṣads date from the thirteenth century is based only on the fact that the texts are not mentioned before this period.[2] A simple absence of mention of a particular text or set of texts in the works of Śākta Tantric commentators does not necessarily indicate a more recent date of composition. Ideological factors, such as the admissibility of certain doctrines or other practical matters regarding secret transmission within lineage traditions sometimes lead historical writers to pass over specific texts despite their relation to the larger sectarian tradition. The so-called late Upaniṣads, and especially those with Tantric characteristics, should be assessed on their own individual merits. There is nothing to indicate that the relationships among these texts are based on more than ideological and thematic affinities. At present we know nothing about their authorship or their historical roots.

In general, the recent—in all likelihood post ninth or post tenth century—sectarian texts that are called "Upaniṣads" are remarkably varied. There are Śaiva, Śākta, and Vaiṣṇava Upaniṣads as well as a significant number on more abstract subjects such as yoga and renunciation (*sannyāsa*).[3] Scholars have brought forth a number of lists of Śākta Upaniṣads—not all of which are explicitly Tantric in content—and have even offered explanations for the indefiniteness that surrounds their history and content.[4]

Sectarian divisions may help us account for the variety of texts, just as the association of certain Upaniṣads with different segments of Śākta tradition clarifies theological positions. But these factors do not explain fully the texts' origins. If mere sectarian or ideological affinity proved the inclusion of texts in a tradition or affirmed the association of a text with a particular sect, then historical studies could better account for their development and their relationships to one another. Past efforts to construct lists of Śākta Upaniṣads have left us no closer to understanding either their "location" in Tantric tradition or their place within the Vedic corpus.[5] For example, the *Śrīvidyā* and *Śricakra Upaniṣad*s, both Śākta Upaniṣads that appear in recent printed collections, seem to have little relation to the Śrīvidyā sect despite their suggestive titles. The *Tripurā Upaniṣad,* to cite just one further example, is considered by all its commentators, Tantric and non-Tantric, to be a part of both the *Ṛg* and *Atharva Veda*s. Yet Bhāskararāya, a usually reliable authority on both Vedic and Tantric lore, "locates" it within an unknown work that he says belongs to *Ṛg* Vedic tradition.[6]

From its designation as a "Upaniṣad" we can first "locate" *Tripurā Upaniṣad* by exploring the Hindu's native category of Vedic revelation (*śruti*). Since texts called "Upaniṣads" are normatively classified as Vedic revelation (*śruti*), they are regarded in some circles as being without any origin (*apauruṣeya*), human or divine. Thus, as *śruti* (literally, "that which is heard"), the Upaniṣad is transcendent knowledge that is "heard" by ancient seers (*ṛṣi*) and only afterward verbalized.[7] For Tantrics, such as Bhāskararāya, *Tripurā Upaniṣad* clearly falls within this most ancient and authoritative body of sacred Word. However, as a theistic Tantric, Bhāskararāya does not believe that the Vedic texts have no author (*apauruṣeya*).[8] Rather, he maintains that Śiva has authored all of the *śruti,* including the Upaniṣads, and that he is their efficient cause. The issue, however, does not stop here: Śiva is also the material cause of revelation (*śruti*) which is nothing less than a verbalized manifestation of his own essence (*svarūpa*). Thus, Bhāskararāya maintains that the Vedas are indeed "uncreated" (*apauruṣeya*) inasmuch as Śiva himself is identical to the uncreated Absolute (*nirguṇa* or *niṣkalā brahman*). As a revelation (*śruti*) of Śiva's very form (*svarūpa*), they cannot be said to differ from him in any respect and are therefore inerrant, inviolate, and infallible.[9]

At stake for the Tantric is not the authority of *śruti* per se which remains largely undisputed but rather its correct interpretation. For non-Tantrics, however, the Upaniṣad's Śākta sectarianism and, more especially, its use of Tantric elements lead them to question whether it is indeed authentic *śruti.*[10] Since all Hindus, with the exception of the ritualist Pūrva Mīmāṃsakas, accept the Upaniṣads as part of the Vedic corpus, the issue is not insignificant. For a text's detractors it is its Tantric contents that bring into question its identity as a "Upaniṣad." At issue is the text's classification as *śruti* and thus its inherent authority as *Veda.*[11] With *Tripurā Upaniṣad*'s authenticity as a Vedic scripture in dispute, we must consider both native and scholarly efforts to locate it more precisely within Hindu tradition.[12]

Tripurā Upaniṣad's classification as Vedic or Tantric (i.e., non-Vedic) literature is certainly not obvious either to Hindus or to scholars. Goudriaan, for example, states that the sectarian Śākta Upaniṣads will not be treated in his study of Hindu Tantric and Śākta literature because "they attach themselves to the other texts of their own genre," that is, to the Vedic literature.[13] He then later states that "the sectarian Upaniṣads, although partaking of the [Vedic] genre, cannot on account of their contents be reckoned to be Vedic literature."[14] Thus, among scholars the precise classification of the Tantric Upaniṣads remains an unexamined issue. For Bhāskararāya, a Kaula Tantric who considers himself no less "Vedic" for his Tantrism, the issue is clear: the Upaniṣad is both Vedic *and* Tantric. This is not, however, precisely the same as saying that it is both Veda and Tantra. The Upaniṣad as *śruti* belongs to a different class of texts than the Tantras per se inasmuch as its authority extends ostensively to all twice-born (*dvija* or *traivarṇika*) Hindus—Tantric or non-Tantric. As a work of *śruti,* a twice-born male by birth is considered qualified to study it, at least at some level. Further, the Upaniṣad should theoretically be limited to *only* twice-born Hindus and should not be studied by those who do not meet this specification.

If viewed as a Vedic and a Tantric text, however, the Upaniṣad is restricted not simply by the criteria of birth and gender. Rather, like the Tantras themselves, it becomes further restricted to those who meet the special moral, intellectual, and spiritual qualifications that obtain for Tantric initiation. For the sake of textual classification the point is that the two types of scripture are not, for the Tantric Vaidika, mutually exclusive: a Vedic *śruti* can be a Tantric text, but a Tantra is not *śruti* even if it originates ultimately from the same theological source, that is, Śiva.

While Bhāskararāya generally does not dispute the authority of the Tantras, specially those attributed to Śiva, he maintains that they are authoritative only in specific contexts for those with Tantric qualifications (*adhikāra*) and initiation (*dīkṣā*). A work of *śruti* then theoretically always supercedes a Tantra since it is itself a manifestation of Śiva while the Tantra is merely a recollection (*smṛti*) of a particular set of Śiva's teachings given to those specially qualified to hear them. However, if the *śruti* is also a Tantric text, its authority may also extend beyond ordinary restrictions to include non–twice-born Tantrics—Bhāskararāya unfortunately never raises this specific issue. It would appear that he objects to the idea that simply because the text is *śruti,* any twice-born male is entitled to study it. Without Tantric initiation a twice-born male lacks the *additional* qualification necessary to receive Tantric teaching. We can assume that if Bhāskararāya did indeed have any non–twice-born (i.e., *śūdra*) or female disciples he maintained one of two positions regarding the study of the Tantric Upaniṣads. Either he did not allow them to study the Upaniṣad on the grounds that it is Vedic *śruti* and thus something for which they do not qualify, or he made an exception because of their special qualifications (*adhikāra*) as Tantrics.[15] For the twice-born Vaidika Tantric it is clear that since a Upaniṣad is *śruti* it is the highest form of scriptural authority since it is both Vedic *and* Tantric in origin. When there is disagreement between teachings or traditions, the Vaidka Tantric looks for practical reconciliation rather than conflict and, it seems, looks past apparent theoretical paradoxes.

Tripurā Upaniṣad's de facto claim as Vedic *śruti* does not prevent us from asserting that its Tantric contents allow a more specific classification. It is denominationally Śākta and belongs to the Śrīkula, which centers on the beneficient goddesses, rather than to the Kālīkula, which centers on horrific images. To be more precise, its internal formulations are specific to the Śrīvidyā school. Yet unlike many texts that append the term "Tantra" to their original titles, *Tripurā Upaniṣad* does not.[16] In what sense then is *Tripurā Upaniṣad* both a Vedic and a Tantric text?

Just as Hindus use the term "Veda" in two distinct but related ways, that is, to name the eternal and transcendent Truth and to distinguish the canon of revelation (*śruti*) from later traditions (*smṛti,* lit. "remembrance" or "recollection") that follow after the Veda, so Hindu Tantrics use the term "Tantra" to designate both their special forms of spiritual discipline (*sādhana*) and the specific texts in which this discipline is discussed. Thus, a text or spiritual discipline may be "Tantric" without having "Tantra" as part of its title just as a text can be "Vedic" without being a part of the Vedas. A Tantric text is deemed "Vedic" either by virtue of its being a form of the Eternal or by belonging to the *śruti* class of texts. We can assume that *Tripurā Upaniṣad,* by its very appropriation of the term "Upaniṣad," does not consider itself non-Vedic, nor does it dissociate itself from what is conventionally understood as the Vedic tradition.[17] Rather, the Upaniṣad's author(s) or compiler(s) deliberately chose to include it within the Vedic corpus and sought to legitimize its sectarian stance and Tantric elements by claiming a classical taxonomy. Furthermore, both Tantrics, such as Bhāskararāya, and others who do not espouse a Tantric or Śākta identity, such as the well-known commentator Upaniṣadbrahmayogin, treat *Tripurā Upaniṣad* as part of Vedic tradition and consider it revelation (*śruti*).[18] Still other Tantrics—notably Lakṣmīdhara, a member of the Samayācāra sect, a conservative branch of the Śrīvidyā school—implicitly deny *Tripurā Upaniṣad*'s status both as *śruti* and as a legitimate Tantric source. The grounds for this rejection are similar to those advanced by non-Tantric critics: the Upaniṣad's contents are antinomian and threaten to undermine both the spirit and the letter of acceptable social and religious (i.e., Dharmic) behavior. Thus, we have a remarkable historical situation in which some non-Tantrics (such as Upaniṣadbrahmayogin) treat the text as authentic Vedic *śruti* while some Tantrics (the non-Kaula Samayācārins) deny its status as both *śruti* and authentic Tantra.

Hindu traditions transmitted orally, usually in vernacular languages, and in written forms in Sanskrit are often, and rather simplistically, treated as either "Vedic" *or* "Tantric" or, to put it differently, as Vaidika *or* Tāntrika.[19] Our evidence suggests, however, that there are not clear normative differences between the traditions or texts regarded as "Vedic" and "Tantric." Rather, there exist substantive differences regarding content. Thus, the relationship between Vedic and Tantric traditions depends on the interpreter, who will likely be involved at some point in an emotionally charged dispute.[20]

Vaidika Tantrics and Non-Tantric Vaidikas: Making a Distinction and Affirming Hindu Identity

Many Tantric sources offer themselves as clear alternatives to Vedic traditions which are considered no longer viable spiritual disciplines (*sādhana*) in the degenerate Kali age. Others, like *Tripurā Upaniṣad,* implicitly claim that Tantric teachings are part and parcel of the most ancient and authoritative body of Vedic traditions. In general, the Vaidika Tantric legitimizes Tantric practice by establishing continuity with the Veda—even though this agenda may remain unstated in the Vaidika Tantric's works.

Tantrics create several interpretive strategies to relate Tantric and Vedic traditions. First, Tantrics, such as Bhāskararāya, by treating "mainstream" Vedic tradition as culminating in Tantric interpretation and practice, undermine the effort to draw a hard and fast distinction between Tantric and Vedic *tradition*. In the view of these Vaidika Tantrics, there is only one tradition—what we call Hindu—within which there is esoteric Tantric discipline (*sādhana*). The Vaidika Tantric does not dispute the Veda's central role in Hindu life since he maintains all Vedic texts to be manifestations of eternal truth and the final authority for all questions of religious import. Rather, Tantrics (1) take issue with conventional lines of interpretation of the Veda and (2) dispute the efficacy of Vedic ritual at several different levels of interpretation and practice. Their overall strategy is to rank (at least implicitly) the contents of Vedic texts and their practice. They can then distinguish the efficacious esoteric elements that deal with liberation and worldly empowerment, which are part of Tantric practice, from those rituals that are merely obligatory or meant for the less qualified.[21] Therefore, in the view of many Tantrics, non-Tantric Hindu interpretations of the Veda either in some manner fail to meet the needs of the current degenerate Kali age or offer only a protracted path to the ultimate realization of *veda*.[22] As a remedy Tantrics teach the necessity of appropriate secret or esoteric (*rahasya*) forms of knowledge (*veda* or *vidyā*) and practice (*sādhana*), distinguishing these from exoteric (*prakaṭa*) non-Tantric elements. Thus, Tantrics do not necessarily consider their teachings, texts, or practices either non-Vedic or anti-Vedic but rather the superior interpretation of the sacred truth (*veda*) revealed in the verbalized *śruti*. As Goudriaan points out, the intention of early Tantric texts is to surpass Vedic rituals without disposing of them; Tantras are said to compliment rather than sublate Vedic prescriptions.[23]

While most Hindu Tantrics who write in Sanskrit treat their traditions as continuous with the Vedic legacy, we should not necessarily accept their views as historical. The majority of Tantric sources and the Śākta formulations of Śrīvidyā are not likely to be *historically* continuous with Vedic traditions—or at least cannot yet be demonstrated to be.[24]

At the same time, Tantric claims for historical connections between Vedic and Tantric sources should not be ignored if we are to probe Tantric self-understanding. Most Śrīvidyā Tantrics are born into Vedic clans and rooted in the traditions of brāhmaṇical orthodoxy. These Tantrics often cross usually prohibited religious and social boundaries; yet none consider themselves outside the parameters of traditional Hindu orthodoxy or in any sense anti-Vedic.

Does the Tantric claim to supersede "mainstream" Vaidika traditions really mean Tantrics are beyond the pale of Vedic tradition as some non-Tantric Vaidikas maintain? Or is Tantrism more accurately described as an esoteric tradition that interprets the "sacred truth" (*veda*) within a more broadly construed Hindu tradition? To answer these questions we may inadvertently assume the respective interpretive positions of the non-Tantric Vaidika and the Vaidika Tantric.

As critical observers one way we might clarify the relationship and the distinction between non-Tantric Vaidikas and Vaidika Tantrics is to consider briefly a *Hindu* religious identity. We should, however, reject normative definitions of *Hindu* identity created by certain Vaidikas who wish to propound their own theological agenda. Unless we free ourselves from theologically oriented definitions we shall lose sight of those factors at the heart of Vaidika Tantric identity and fail to appreciate the fundamental objections to Tantrism posed by certain non-Tantric Vaidikas.

Brian K. Smith's definition of Hinduism frees us from an unwanted theological agenda. Smith defines Hinduism as "the religion of those humans who create, perpetuate, and transform traditions with legitimizing reference to the authority of the Veda."[25] This definition juxtaposes Hindus and non-Hindus and allows us to distinguish those Tantrics who reject any "legitimizing reference to the authority of the Veda" (and hence are classified non-Hindu) from those who use the Veda as the key legitimizing factor for determining their religious identity. The point is not that Hindus are those who are necessarily familiar with the content of the Veda, since most are not, but rather that Hindus look to the concept of the Veda to legitimize their religious beliefs, political structures, and social actions.

Smith's definition is particularly useful in our effort to define Tantrism. Smith eschews the idea that Hinduism can be defined by a body of doctrines or beliefs. It is not the content of the Veda per se that forms the boundaries of Hinduism. Rather, Hinduism has to do with the complex ways in which people engage the notion of Veda. If Tantrism is wrongly defined in relation to "normative" Hindu beliefs within the Vedic tradition, it may not be "Hindu" at all. For example, prescriptive regulations regarding caste commonly found in brāhmaṇical texts will not suffice to distinguish Hindus from non-Hindus. Like those non-Tantrics who espoused *bhakti* devotionalism, Tantrics resist certain notions of caste in determining qualification for practice (*sādhana*) and reject the inherent superiority of the brahman priest. Yet both non-Tantric devotionalists and Tantrics continue to venerate and legitimize themselves with respect to the Veda. Hinduism must be understood as a social and historical engagement with the Veda in which the parties involved do not necessarily agree.[26]

To put the issue in the vocabulary of Indian religious polemics, Hindu Tantrics, even when they advocate antinomian religious practices are never classified by their opponents as *nāstikas,* that is, they are not spoken of in ways comparable to Buddhists or Jains as "nay-sayers" to the sacred truth of Veda.[27] Thus all Hindus will regard the Veda, in some sense, as the beginning of all religious speculation and the locus of Truth. Insofar as the "Veda" is not thought of as texts prescribing rituals and doctrines, but rather as the Truth itself, it functions as the sacred center of all beliefs and practices which unite the moral community into a religious community.[28] For the Hindu, the Veda, in this broader sense, is the acknowledgment of a Truth against which all other truths are measured; it is not the texts or teachings to which all other texts and teachings must literally conform. Veda is more than the contents of texts. Rather it is a canon which functions as a collective representation of *Hindu* society. Tantrics are castigated for having violated the Veda in the sense of having transgressed the moral, political, and social conditions for admission into the Hindu community.

The concept of "Tantra" functions similarly as a collective representation of a certain set of Hindus. "Tantra" sets apart a canon and a community within the Hindu community. The Vaidika Tantric desires to create a method by which he integrates his own tradition into Hinduism. He does so by distinguishing his Tantrism from other, non-Tantric forms of discipline. In the process he creates a social and religious situation which privileges his position. We will need to consider further the Tantrics' reasons for claiming a superior type of Hindu practice.

The non-Tantric Vaidika's objections to Tantrism cannot be satisfactorily based on Tantric claims to special forms of knowledge gained through texts that claim to surpass conventional Vedic scriptural traditions. The "early" Upaniṣads, for example, have been interpreted by non-Tantric Vedāntins as surpassing certain Vedic ritual traditions; as forms of privileged knowledge the Upaniṣads claim to supercede previous revelations. Claims of scriptural, doctrinal, or ritual superiority within Hindu circles have generally not led to criticism comparable to that Tantrics receive. In Indian religious history, dissent has always been admitted to be a legitimate part of sectarian Hinduism. Claiming the correct interpretation of sacred truth (*veda*) is one way for sectarian theologies (*siddhānta*) to distinguish themselves. As a set of texts and traditions representing a type of spiritual discipline (*sādhana*) that legitimizes itself as an interpretation of the Veda, Tantrics make no more bold a claim than other Hindus.

Further, Hindus from at least since the period of the earliest Upaniṣads (c. 550 B.C.E.), have not only accommodated but sustained and fostered proponents of esoteric knowledge.

The privileged and usually private instructions of a guru to a student as well as traditions of special knowledge are rooted in the most ancient forms of Vedic transmission. Upaniṣads themselves are frequently interpreted within Vedānta traditions as the fulfillment of Vedic speculation. Vaidika Tantrics, such as Bhāskararāya, maintain that their spiritual discipline is esoteric in the sense of being an "interior" (Greek, *esoteros*), concealed, and specially initiated form of knowledge involving interpretation and practice drawn from both Vedic *śruti and* Tantric *smṛti* sources which "recollect" the *śruti.*[29] Esoteric teachings then are hardly foreign to Vaidikas or unique to Tantric tradition, though Tantrism may well be the esoteric movement *par excellence* in Indian religions.

Some of the Vedic sources interpreted esoterically by Tantrics fall squarely within the undisputed mainstream of Vedic tradition. Śrīvidyā adepts, for example, look to the *Ṛg Veda* in order to locate their tradition canonically within the Veda and to make the claim that even seemingly exoteric Vedic sources contain esoteric Tantric knowledge. They interpret *Ṛg Veda* 5.47.4 to be a secret (*rahasya*) form of the *śrīvidyā,* their most important mantra.[30]

Other Vedic texts, such as the Upaniṣads, do not "conceal" Tantric teachings, as is the case in the *Ṛg Veda,* precisely because these sources were intended for a more limited audience. The Upaniṣads' audience, however, is still larger than that of the Tantras since the latter are held to be further restricted by Tantric regulations. This also suggests to the Tantric that his texts are, in some sense, superior to even the Vedas. The *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra* delivers what might be considered the definitive statement on the superiority of Tantric esotericism: "Like a prostitute the mantras [or teachings, *vidyā*] of the Vedas and other [non-Tantric teachings] are explicit (*prakaṭa*). Among all views this [Śrīvidyā] is [most] secret (*rahasya*)."[31]

Rāmeśvara Sūri, a commentator on *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra* in the lineage of Bhāskararāya, further explains that while Vedic teachings can be obtained for a price (to a male born into a twice-born family), the Tantric Śrīvidyā is a gift of the guru; the knowledge (*vidyā,* specifically the mantra) that leads to realization, he says, is not available even for gold.[32]

Tripurā Upaniṣad's legitimizing reference to the Veda is, in effect, no different than that of other Upaniṣads (or Tantric texts) whose contents are defined as secret (*rahasya*) rather than explicit (*prakaṭa*). Yet, just like other sectarian Tantric texts containing antinomian teachings, *Tripurā Upaniṣad*'s place within a Vedic tradition that admits secret texts and esoteric interpretations is controversial and disputed.[33]

Considering Tantric interpretations or sources as esoteric, doctrinally superior, or superceding conventionally recognized Vedic traditions may be a serious polemical issue. However, it would not necessarily compel non-Tantric Vaidikas to excoriate Tantrism as beyond the parameters of valid religion. What then is it about Tantrics and their texts that causes non-Tantric Vaidikas to react with unconcealed hostility? The dispute must center on the legitimacy of the contents of texts which in specific ways reach beyond the boundaries of "legitimate" esotericism.

At stake in the conflict between non-Tantric Vaidikas and Vaidika Tantrics are not matters strictly of sectarian ideology, of esoteric knowledge, or of the admission into tradition of particular scriptural sources. Rather, the issue is the legitimacy of concepts and practices with social consequences for the larger community. We must, however, also keep in mind the more subtle distinction made between that which is merely advocated and that which is actually practiced. One may ask: What sort of conduct, private or public, will Hindu society at a given point in history tolerate as part of acceptable religious belief and ritual practice?

In the eyes of some Vaidikas, Tantric spiritual discipline (*sādhana*), whether merely advocated or actually practiced, crosses the boundaries of social and moral legitimacy identified as Vedic and thereby becomes unacceptable. For others the issue is significant only when Tantrics violate publicly certain normative standards of behavior. Falling outside the parameters of the moral community as they define it, Tantrics advocate illicit, "non-Vedic" forms of behavior. Unacceptable behavior, however, is not necessarily limited to the more obvious breaches of high-caste brahman ethics such as indulging in the ritual use of "prohibited" substances (*pañcamakāra*) or forms of meditation involving the female sex (*kāmakalādhyāna*). It may include such things as the theoretical or practical involvement of non-twice born persons (*advija*) and/or women into initiated ritual traditions, usually restricted to males of the three estates (*traivarṇika*) of Aryan Indian society. At stake then is also a violation of the boundaries of purity and impurity, which as Louis Dumont has observed, establishes Indian social hierarchy in religious terms.[34] By admitting impure persons into the fold of initiates, Tantrics dispute the social and religious order by violating the hierarchical principles through which Indian society is ordered. From the standpoint of the non-Tantric Vaidika, Tantric teachings threaten to undermine the most sacred boundaries of Hindu civilization. As Krishna warns at the outset of the *Bhagavadgītā,* without Dharma established caste duties will be confused.

Hindu texts and traditions viewed in their historical contexts preserve a creative tension between fundamental, normative values and a fluid, dynamic process of critical self-understanding; a rigid, legalistic interpretation of Hindu Dharma will not do justice to the complex factors involved in determining acceptable conduct.[35] Certainly Vaidika Tantrics do not consider themselves any less Vedic simply because they do not conform to specific legalistic prescriptions set forth in the law books (*dharmaśāstra*). These works on Dharma or "conduct" are themselves not univocal on matters of correct (i.e., orthodox) belief and behavior. While certain conservative Vaidika Tantrics, such as the Samayācārin follower Lakṣmīdhara, admonish their more radical peers and dissociate themselves from the "*avaidika* path" they deem unacceptable, others, such as Kaulācārin Bhāskararāya, see no violation of Dharma in even the most "antinomian" Tantric practices. "Orthodox" and "antinomian," we should recall, are themselves positions staked out to distinguish "us" from "them."

Ideological standards based on conformity to legal and ritual sources (especially *dharmaśāstra, gṛhyasūtras,* and *śrautasūtras*) do not suffice to explain why non-Tantric Vaidikas condemn Tantrics and reject their texts as anti-Vedic. At issue are types of behavior whose social ramifications threaten the very foundations of brāhmaṇical socioreligious power. In a culture in which social and religious hierarchy is determined through individual and communal expressions of power based not on economics per se but on complex relational religious categories such as purity/impurity and auspicious/inauspicious, certain types of behavior—whether merely advocated or actually practiced—can threaten the established order and force privileged, socially conservative elements to take action against the perceived threat.

At stake are community roles as well as types of religious *and* political power that translate into social status. Conservative, anti-Tantric Vaidikas regard Tantric behavior as an aberrant perversion of moral values. Few regard it as having subversive potential as a revolutionary theology. Tantrics threaten to overturn or, at the very least, exercise an unwanted influence on the basic values that maintain the socioreligious political order.

By their advocacy of "radical" esotericism Tantrics not only subvert the intellectual authority of brahmans but bring into question their moral and religious privileges as the arbiters of the Veda. Tantrics may also gain access to and patronage from ruling powers and thereby threaten the political as well as the religious prerogatives of non-Tantric brahmans. It is little wonder that Tantrism's most strident opponents are those with the most to lose: non-Tantric Vaidika brahmans whose authority and status is thrown into question by the Tantrics' claims to religious and moral superiority. Tantric theory and practice, taken to its fullest extent, would rend the social and moral fabric of Vaidika conventionality obsolete by altering standards of behavior and reordering Dharma. The concepts of purity and impurity upon which the society is ordered and the ritual practices established for the sake of binding the actions of castes to mutually beneficial, reciprocally determined human aims, the Tantric renders moot and reinterprets to suit a new, more complex set of worldly circumstances. At stake for the non-Tantric Vaidika is not only his own personal status, which we should not underestimate, but his understanding of the entire order of existence, structured by a hierarchical socioreligious system that shapes his own picture of the Hindu cosmos.

Tantrics claim that their beliefs and practices are not meant for the many and that Tantric esotericism does not upset the conventional social and religious order. This point, however, goes largely unnoticed by those non-Tantrics who object to Tantrism for ethical reasons. The Tantric, by privileging himself with a superior interpretation of the Veda, also exempts himself from the majority's understanding of the ethics that govern the public moral community.

The non-Tantric Vaidika reaction to Kaula Tantrism, which emphasizes its moral as well as its intellectual superiority, is excoriating. Tantrics threaten not merely theological tenets but society and its "just" (i.e., Dharmic) order. Viewed differently, Tantrics threaten to cut in on brāhmaṇical power by offering non-brahmans—and especially the political Ksatriyas—a religious power which not only equals but supersedes the brahmans' authority. Tantrics not only diminish the non-Tantric brahmans' roles socially and religiously. They may, in fact, render non-Tantric brahmans irrelevant: whatever rituals are performed by the non-Tantric Vaidika can be more effectively accomplished by the Vaidika Tantric, who has access to both exoteric and esoteric knowledge suitable to the *kaliyuga.*

We should note, however, that what the conservative non-Tantric sees as a threat actually reasserts in several important ways the established socioreligous order. The Tantric's "double norm," whereby conventional Hindu Dharma is upheld for those not yet qualified for Tantric teaching, serves, at least superficially, to reaffirm the *status quo.*

Vaidika Tantrics rarely respond directly to criticism, but do so implicitly by using established Vaidika sources to defend their traditions as legitimate esotericism. It is better, Bhāskararāya says, citing the *Bhagavadgītā,* to leave the ill-equipped and unqualified with their misconceptions then to risk confusing and destroying a world in which they can live.[36]

Thus, the Tantric way of life does not intend to overturn the established social order but rather offer a more soteriologically efficacious alternative for the qualified few. Since most Vaidika Tantrics, and especially the historical proponents of the Śrīvidyā school, are from brahman communities of high social rank with religious influence, they would have no interest in abandoning established familial traditions. Nor would brahman Tantrics engage in socially controversial activities at the risk of already accomplished public, socioreligious status—unless, of course, the rewards are suitably attractive and the potential for damaging consequences is somehow muted.

Tantrics, who are at the same time Vaidika traditionalists, are not as revolutionary in the ethical sense as they might appear. The revolutionary threat that Tantric theology poses to the social hierarchy is misconstrued by those who see it only as antinomianism. Rather, Tantrism antinomianism is a deliberate and calculated response to emotionally and intellectually untenable alternatives arising within the Hindu fold.

The Vaidika Tantric attempts to secure a place in the traditional order by maintaining outward appearances that conform to socioreligious expectations. Yet, at the same time, Tantrics create an alternative center of power within the Hindu structure. Despite their professed claims to egalitarianism, Vaidika Tantrics are usually no more willing to undermine the established socioreligious hierarchy than are other non-Tantric Vaidikas.

Undoubtedly, Tantrism's spread and influence beyond closed, initiated ranks has contributed to the threat perceived by its detractors. Its more radical excesses have seemingly confirmed detractors' claims of moral degeneration and social antinomianism. One could argue, however, that whether or not the threat to brāhmaṇical power is perceived or actual, the reaction of the non-Tantric Vaidikas is predictable.

Theoretically or practically suspect forms of social behavior—such as including non–twice born persons into the fold of initiates, consuming wine, or practicing ritual sexual intercourse—are precisely what many Tantrics, including Bhāskararāya, advocate are necessary for effecting genuine religious freedom.[37] Without an intellectual and practical reversal of values, the Tantric argues, there is no means for transcending the delimiting factors of ordinary human existence. It is only by upsetting the *status quo,* that is, by violating the brahman community's morals and notions of purity and pollution that one can break through the superficial division between the sacred and the profane. This religious breakthrough, however, need not be done at the expense of one's conventional social status. Bhāskararāya is an excellent example of the Tantric whose biography remains untainted by those who would oppose his Tantric life style.

The Vaidika Tantric never intends either his beliefs or his practices to be publicly observed or treated as exoteric knowledge. The Tantric's secrets (*rahasya*) are not meant for everyone and therefore do not intend to interfere with Vedic conventions. Among contemporary Śrīvidyā adepts, for example, we see in their treatment of women a situation in which traditional roles of subservience are reinforced despite the idealization of (or fascination with) the goddess as theologically superior. Women, like the goddess herself, are made ultimately subordinate to and dependent upon males; their ritual role is often limited to the position of being a partner for male adepts.[38] Thus, by retaining a "double norm"—one esoteric and private, the other exoteric and public—the Vaidika Tantric seeks to exempt himself from criticism and assert his own ritual and intellectual superiority from within the Hindu tradition.[39]

The non-Tantric Vaidika's perception of a threat is not entirely imaginary. Despite claims of continuity and conformity, the Vaidika Tantric posits a real alternative, a parallel community within the Hindu system in which the structures of power and authority are shifted in his favor. At stake, however, is not an egalitarian alternative to non-Tantric norms but the privileged centers of power. The Tantric need not reinvent Hinduism to gain his privilege, he need only effect the transformation in such a way that the legitimizing authority becomes both Veda *and* Tantra.

In sum, Tantrics claim that their superior interpretation of sacred truth (*veda*) coupled with an unconventional spiritual practice reinvigorates and fulfills the Hindu's worldly and spiritual aims. Armed with a common Hindu notion that this degenerate age calls for drastic measures, the Tantric creates an alternative to *bhakti* egalitarianism and intellectually powerful Vedānta traditions. And yet this dynamic response is coupled with inherently conservative tendencies designed to maintain privilege that already exists. For the non-Tantric Vaidika the private, internally bounded world of Tantric practice (*sādhana*) is still entirely a part of the public, moral community; esotericism alone cannot justify Tantric beliefs and practices. Yet it is this claim to esoteric knowledge that Vaidika Tantrics such as Bhāskararāya insist not only privileges their position within the Vedic tradition but leaves them beyond reproach.

Locating *Tripurā Upaniṣad:* Its Historical and Theological Roles

From the perspective of the critical observer the Vedic texts, including the "Upaniṣads," are clearly of historical human authorship.[40] Thus, when Tantric Vaidikas call the text "Upaniṣad" they make not only a theological statement but a historical statement as well. By claiming the Tantric teachings of the text to be Vedic *śruti,* they are also asserted to be the most ancient and, hence the most authentic, form of Hindu tradition.

In this regard the Upaniṣad's author(s) or compiler(s) have to some extent succeeded. At least one commentator with impeccable Vaidika credentials and no Tantric allegiances, Upaniṣadbrahmayogin, regards the

Upaniṣad as *śruti* and places it within the Vedic corpus.[41] More recently, printed editions of Upaniṣads and other Upaniṣadic studies, many of which have been done by non-Tantric Vaidikas, have not hesitated to include *Tripurā Upaniṣad* and a host of other Tantric Upaniṣads.[42] If the Vaidika Tantric(s), who authored or compiled this Śāktra Tantric Upaniṣad (and others like it), were seeking legitimacy from non-Tantric Vaidikas for their teachings and practices by using the term "Upaniṣad," they clearly succeeded—at least to the extent that their efforts have left an imprint on the interpretation of Vedic *śruti* within the broader Hindu tradition. The issue of the legitimacy or authenticity of these Tantric Upaniṣads appears to be, as it has always been, a matter primarily of interest to the very few.

Tantrics, however, do not express their interest in legitimizing themselves or in appropriating a native category *only* for the sake of shaping an image palatable to others. They call this text a "Upaniṣad" because they believe it *is śruti* and because they see Tantric theory and practice as squarely *within* the Vedic tradition. Thus, the use of the term "Upaniṣad," an acknowledged form of esoteric Vedic knowledge, need not be construed as manipulative or for the sake of mere image-shaping but rather as perfectly natural. The *Tripurā Upaniṣad*'s author(s) or compiler(s) merely have done what they believe appropriate: adopt the format within Vedic revelation (*śruti*) in which to divulge esoteric knowledge. Since the Upaniṣad's proponents do not consider themselves anti-Vedic, their belief that Tantric teaching is within the Veda includes not only hidden or secret (*rahasya*) forms within established texts (such as the *śrīvidyā* mantra in the *Ṛg Veda*) but other forms of esoteric Vedic knowledge.

Turning to the claims and disputes within the Tantric fold, the "Upaniṣad" is *śruti* and/or Tantric scripture depending on how its contents are accepted as theoretical and practical spiritual discipline. This is evident within the Śrīvidyā school's treatment of *Tripurā Upaniṣad*. There is hardly a consensus within Śrīvidyā on the crucial points of theory and practice; the same points that distinguish non-Tantric Vaidikas from Vaidika Tantrics are fundamentally responsible for divisions within Śrīvidyā. Do the contents represent esoteric wisdom and a set of extraordinary ritual prescriptions for the specially qualified? Or does the text reach beyond the acceptable limits of even esoteric traditions?

Virtually all Hindu Śākta Tantrics admit into their doctrine and practice *in some manner* certain Tantric elements that the conservative Vaidikas reject as antinomian and unorthodox.[43] The exception is the *Samayācārins* or Practitioners of Convention within the Śrīvidyā system. Represented principally by Lakṣmīdhara, a sixteenth-century figure best known for his commentary on the *Saundaryalaharī,* the Samayins are fiercely puritanical. Rejecting the "double norm," they attempt to reform Tantric practice in ways that bring it in line with high-caste brāhmaṇical norms. As we shall see, however, the Samayins should still be classified "Tantrics."

The majority of Tantric sources, including most within the Śrīvidyā school, belong to what is called generally "Kaula Tantrism." As a term used to specify forms of Śākta Tantrism, "Kaula," and related terms, such as "Kaulika," have lost virtually all specialized meanings.[44] Lakṣmīdhara and the Practitioners of Convention (*samayācārins*), however, use it to distinguish their particularly conservative brand of Tantrism from "the Practitioners of Kula" tradition (*kula-* or *kaulācāra*).[45] For Lakṣmīdhara, the Samaya represents a "pure" Vaidika Śrīvidyā, while Kaula traditions are antinomian and against Hindu Dharma (*avaidika*). Within Śrīvidyā this distinction is crucial. It sets apart the Samayācārins, who utterly reject the controversial Tantric elements (such as the "five m's") as a part of their spiritual discipline (*sādhana*) from the Kaulas or Kaulācārins, who, in one way or another, admit them.

Śrīvidyā's Samaya/Kaula division marks an old dispute within Hindu Tantrism. The split within Tantrism is best known through the traditionally popular division of right-handed (*dakṣiṇācāra,* represented in Śrīvidyā by the Samayins) and left-handed forms of practice (*vāmācāra,* including Bhāskararāya and others who admit the Kaula elements). As we shall see, internal differences within Śrīvidyā are not always made following these divisions. In general, both wings of Tantric tradition claim the superiority of their own views. Both Kaulas and Samayins, as we shall argue, deserve to be called "Tantrics," even if Samayins would reject this appellation.

It is hardly surprising that the Samayin Lakṣmīdhara does not mention the Kaula-oriented *Tripurā Upaniṣad* in his work. As a result, we unfortunately have no way of assessing his opinion on the use of the term "Upaniṣad" for Kaula-oriented texts. This too is hardly surprising since he mentions Kaula sources only in general terms so that he can distance the Samaya school from their teachings and assert the supremacy of Samaya ideology and disciplines. We may surmise that, like most non-Tantric Vaidikas, Lakṣmīdhara would reject outright the Upaniṣad's *de facto* claim as *śruti* based on a general remark in which he calls Kaula views "against the Vedic tradition," or even "non-Vedic," that is, *avaidika* and "not for the twice-born."[46] Other Samaya-oriented contemporary South Indian Śrīvidyā adepts who wish to avoid an "unnecessary controversy" and instead concentrate on the exegesis and practice of their own traditional teachings avoid the delicate issue completely. They simply do not discuss the text or the topic.[47] However, an "out of sight, out of mind" method will not always suffice: Vaidikas suspected of being involved in unacceptable Tantric behavior are the targets of innuendo and censure among the more socially and intellectually conservative.[48]

The *Tripurā Upaniṣad,* as we shall see in Chapter Three, is explicitly oriented to the Kaula lines of Hindu Tantrism. Though Bhāskararāya takes its prescriptions as literal injunctions, others, especially within the living traditions of Śrīvidyā in South India, advocate a metaphorical understanding of its controversial elements.[49] These invariably high-caste Kaula Śrīvidyā adepts (1) accept the controversial elements of Tantrism and (2) remain concerned with traditional social boundaries defined by brāhmaṇical Indian society.

Kaula Tantrics who are also "conservative" Vaidikas admit the Upaniṣad and other Kaula-oriented sources into their canon by interpreting potentially scandalous prescriptions in two ways. They treat them either (1) as nominally acceptable symbolic acts to be performed with "harmless" substitutes (*pratinidhi*)—such as milk for wine, or a fish-shaped ritual spoon for the offering of fish—or (2) they perform them entirely as internal, purely mental forms of discipline or sacrifice (*antaryāga*). Thus, they avoid any explicit relationship with socially questionable forms of behavior. On rare occasions a contemporary Kaula-oriented Śrīvidyā adept will admit to the use of certain controversial elements, such as wine or meat, in the special contexts of ritual, but these, he will insist, are private and secret acts governed by specific rules.

The Samayins hold that all ritual and outward forms of practice should be internalized, that is, made entirely mental or symbolic. They not only reject any use of wine, the consumption of nonvegetarian food, or explicit sexual acts but any external ritual. Kaula Śrīvidyā adepts, however, admit both external (*bahir-*) and internal (*antar-*) types of ritual actions (*yāga*). Kaulas usually incorporate at least a mention of the *pañcamakāras* in external forms of ritual worship (*upāsana*). In contemporary Śrīvidyā, however, this internal/external distinction along Samaya and Kaula lines is blurred. Self-proclaimed Samayins continue to perform external rituals despite Lakṣmīdhara's protestations, though they continue to reject any of the potentially controversial Kaula elements, such as the *pañcamakāras.* Further, some interpret Laksmīdhara to say that Samayācāra Śrīvidyā is

Vaidika in the traditional sense of excluding non–twice-born persons (*advija* or *atraivarṇika*). This is not, in fact, Lakṣmīdhara's position. Rather than excluding the non–twice-born from Śrīvidyā, he limits the twice-born to Samayācāra and admits that even outcastes (*śūdra*) can be qualified for Śrīvidyā initiation.[50] Contemporary Samayins deliberately misread Lakṣmīdhara in order to adjust their Tantric practices into a conformity with contemporary Vaidika mores regarding restrictions pertaining to the Dharma of Estates and Stages in Life (*varṇāśrama-dharma*).[51] Their point is simple: they wish to admit practices and concepts that are Tantric in the sense of being esoteric knowledge but do not wish to be associated with Tantrism's so-called anti-Vedic social ethics. Similarly, many contemporary Kaula Śrīvidyā adepts who belong to socially conservative, high-caste communities either eschew the controversial elements completely in order to avoid reproach (and thus remain a part of the conventional traditions regarding caste), or they adopt "harmless" ritual substitutes. This interpretation involving substitutions (*pratinidhi*) is followed by contemporary South Indian followers of Bhāskararāya, despite Bhāskararāya's assertion that it is better not to do certain rituals at all than to substitute elements without justification.[52] A minority in South India, however, still advocate or literally practice Kaula rituals, at least in some manner, and yet participate fully in Vaidika roles without facing the censure of the brahman community. How can Tantrics who otherwise match contemporary Vaidika expectations advocate or practice potentially scandalous rituals and avoid censure?

Bhāskararāya, who both prescribed in his works and, according to legend, practiced the literal prescriptions of the Kaula path (*mārga*) (including the use of five "prohibited substances"[*pañcamakāra*] and the sexually explicit *kāmakalā* meditation) can serve as an example of this problem. We can assume three scenarios along with their social and historical consequences; these situations are not necessarily mutually exclusive. First, it is possible that Bhāskararāya's society was different than brahman society today. In other words, it is possible that it was, to some extent, more permissive. Thus, his views could be quietly tolerated privately but not condoned or advocated publicly. This interpretation seems plausible if only because there are documented instances in which comparable breaches of Dharma have been overlooked.[53] Second, it is possible that he acted with impunity, in private or public, since his advocacy of Kaulism was a matter of literary record. By virtue of his acclaim as a traditional scholar and guru, it is possible that he was able to retain his social position despite his antinomianism. A reputation for erudition and spiritual accomplishment, however, would not necessarily prevent criticism from non-Tantric Vaidikas. But we know that Bhāskararāya received the largess of Seforji, the Maratha King of Tañjavūr, and obtained a significant land grant which gave him tacit control over the affairs of a sizable village.[54] Non-Tantric Vaidikas, had they known of Bhāskararāya's activities and disapproved, would have hardly been in a position to object too openly. By obtaining political patronage and power, Bhāskararāya may not have legitimized his Kaula Tantric behavior, but he certainly placed himself in a position beyond the limits of local brahmans to control. Third, and more likely, is that he acted in privacy to avoid public opprobrium. He thereby removed from sight those activities that would undoubtedly be considered controversial. By maintaining a private and secret practice and, at the same time, a public "Vedic life," Bhāskararāya could practice the "double norm," that is, be both Tantric and Vedic without raising suspicions or casting doubts on his morality.[55] While the political and historical record in this case remains vague, Bhāskararāya's legacy as an intellectual and paradigm of religious power remains almost wholly untainted. The majority of contemporary South Indian brahmans who reject Kaulism are nonetheless disposed to ignore Bhāskararāya's purported Kaula behavior or even deny that he actually practiced what he advocated.[56] We remain less certain of Bhāskararāya's actual social situation beyond the stories of fame and royal patronage that form part of his legendary biography.[57]

Like the puritanical Samayin Lakṣmīdhara, Bhāskararāya was born into an orthodox brahman family and was exceptionally learned in Vedic traditions, a fact clearly in evidence in the *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya*. Ironically, Bhāskararāya's fame and traditional authority within the Śrīvidyā system extends well beyond that of Lakṣmīdhara. His work is better known than Lakṣmīdhara's even among contemporary Samaya adepts.[58] Yet Bhāskararāya dissociates neither himself nor Śrīvidyā from Kaula Śākta Tantrism. Some Tantric wisdom, Bhāskararāya observes, is within Vedic conventional sources, as is the case with the principle mantra (*mūlamantra*) esoterically contained in the *Ṛg Veda;* one need only have the special interpretive insight of the initiated Śrīvidyā adept, he says, to reveal the Veda's deeply secret (*atirahasya*), intended meaning. Other Tantric wisdom, he implies, is encoded within esoteric Vedic sources, that is, within Śākta Tantric Upaniṣads such as the *Tripurā*. While these sources are *śruti*, other forms of Tantric recollection (*smṛti*), such as the Tantras per se or the *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra,* he classifies more ambiguously. Having come directly from divine sources, such as Śiva or the avatara of Viṣṇu, Paraśurāma, and passed through Tantric sages, these works too are in some sense beyond criticism and the contamination of fallible human authorship. Thus, they are not like most *smṛti* literature inasmuch as they are set apart from other humanly created sources; yet they remain distinct from Vedic *śruti* inasmuch as they are not the very essence (*svarūpa*) of Śiva.

For Bhāskararāya both Veda and Tantra are infallible scripture no matter what interpretive stance is taken regarding their origin. Like other Tantrics, Bhāskararāya eschewed the purely theoretical dispute regarding textual classification. Tantrics with few exceptions are far more concerned with praxis and with interpreting discipline than they are engaged in intellectual controversy per se. Only Samayins by virtue of their ideology feel compelled to express their views on the status of texts.[59]

In summary, we may conclude that the *Tripurā Upaniṣad,* like several other Śākta Upaniṣads, has succeeded in leaving its mark on both the non-Tantric Vaidika tradition and the Kaula-influenced schools of Śrīvidyā. Its status as *śruti* goes literally unquestioned until very recent times while its Kaula Tantric contents demand explanation from any Śrīvidyā adept.

Tripurā Upaniṣad: The Commentaries of Bhāskararāya and Other Śākta Tantrics

It was noted at the outset of this chapter, that it is virtually impossible to assign dates to texts such as *Tripurā Upaniṣad* because of our scanty knowledge of their historical origins and transmission within lineage traditions. The Upaniṣad's capricious presentation of ideas and deliberately archaic Vedic (or quasi-Vedic) language only complicates rather than clarifies its history. References either to individual verses or to the text itself do not appear before the fifteenth century. Kaivalyāśrama, a commentator on the *Saundaryalaharī* who likely postdates Lakṣmīdhara (c. 1500) and predates Bhāskararāya, is perhaps the first to mention the text by name or cite its contents.[60]

It is not until Bhāskararāya (sometime after 1741 C.E.) and his contemporary Upaniṣadbrahmayogin compose commentaries on the text as unit that it is certain all the individual verses do, in fact, exist and are viewed as a single work. We may take the absence of mention either of individual verses or of the text by name in the works of such encyclopedic and important earlier Tantric writers as Śrīvidyānandanātha, author of the *Saubhāgyaratnākara,* to indicate (1) that the verses were not yet composed, (2) that the text as an identifiable unit was not yet compiled, (3) that its contents (either as individual verses or as a text) were deliberately kept secret or were passed only in restricted lineages, or (4) that its verses were not considered particularly useful for explicating doctrine and thus were left out of written commentaries.

It is plausible that individual verses of the text existed independently before their compilation. This is possible not only because the Upaniṣad is not cited by early writers but because its presentation is thematically disjointed. Several prominent contemporary Śrīvidyā adepts maintain that the text is ancient and base their beliefs on the use of Vedic vocabulary.[61] If, however, we assume the text originally existed as individual stray verse couplets, which were eventually complied on the basis of similar linguistic style and coherent thematic relations, there is certainly no better format for their presentation than the traditionally arcane, unsystematic genre of Upaniṣad. On the other hand, the presence of these linguistic and thematic features throughout the text also suggests the possibility that the Upaniṣad was conceived as a whole. Whatever the case, surely the coherence of the text depends more on related sectarian themes and subjects than on the orderly development of issues in consecutive verses.

The Upaniṣad's Vedic Sanskrit leads us to believe that its use is either a deliberate appropriation intended to evoke the tenor of an ancient authority or that its verses do indeed come from the hoary past. Certainly Bhāskararāya, like many contemporary adepts, maintains the latter. While the language of the text is of little use for assigning it a date, it is noteworthy that other Śākta Upaniṣads belonging to the Śrīvidyā cult do not deliberately appropriate Vedic language in ways comparable to *Tripurā Upaniṣad.* Bhāskararāya, as well as the text's other commentators, go to great lengths to explain the Vedic characteristics of the Upaniṣad.

One can conclude at present only that the Upaniṣad as an identifiable composite and unified source is of relatively recent origins, perhaps postfifteenth century. If it is not ancient, as Śrīvidyā adepts are inclined to believe, it is clear that its author(s)/compiler(s) intended that it should bear the qualities and carry the authority of ancient Vedic scripture (*śruti*). Bhāskararāya and a handful of historically recent Tantric adepts, including Kaivalyāśrama, not only treat the text as *śruti* but point to its Vedic language and grammar as an authentication of its origins and status as ancient revelation.

The root-text of *Tripurā Upaniṣad* is preserved in at least two recensions representing two distinct branches (*śākha*) of Vedic tradition. Bhāskararāya notes that the text's two recensions lead to differing opinions regarding terminology and interpretation. He makes his own position clear from the outset of his commentary. He follows the reading of the Upaniṣad that belongs to the *Ṛg Veda* and, in important instances, points out the different readings that occur in the *Atharva Veda* recension.[62] Bhāskararāya's placement of the text within a subbranch of the *Ṛg* Vedic school does little to clarify its historical origins or transmission since his own references are obscure.[63] Upaniṣadbrahmayogin's placement of the text within both *Ṛg* and *Atharva Vedas* confirms its transmission along two lines of tradition but does not further resolve the variations that occur in the separate recensions. The only additional conclusion that may be drawn is that as part of a *Ṛg Veda* tradition, *Tripurā Upaniṣad* is extraordinary inasmuch as it goes beyond the common attribution of late sectarian Upaniṣads to only the *Atharva Veda.*[64]

While our present study is concerned primarily with Bhāskararāya's version of the root (*mūla*) text, which appears in a consistent form in manuscripts containing his commentary, there are four other known historical commentaries on *Tripurā Upaniṣad.*[65]

Upaniṣadbrahmayogin's commentary is perhaps the best known since editions and translations of Śākta Upaniṣads based on his commentary have been published by the Adyar Library in Madras.[66] While it is unclear precisely when in his career this prolific author penned his commentary on this and "107" other Upaniṣads, his interpretive insights are all the more remarkable if only because he is not considered to be a Śākta, a Tantric, or a Śrīvidyā adept.[67] Contemporary Śrīvidyā adepts regard Upaniṣadbrahmayogin's effort more as an interpretation within the philosophical schools of nondualistic Vedānta (*advaitavedānta*) than as a part of Śrīvidyā.[68] He is, as a twice-born Vaidika, qualified by birth to comment on the Upaniṣad as a work of *śruti.*

Upaniṣadbrahmayogin spent the majority of his career virtually a neighbor to Bhāskararāya, living in the nearby city of Kāñcipuram in South India. Bhāskararāya, however, makes no specific mention of either his work or his opinions. This is, most likely, not a simple oversight. Upaniṣadbrahmayogin was not a Śākta Tantric; Bhāskararāya would have no reason to cite a noninitiate interpreter as a Tantric authority. As historical observers, however, we cannot help but admire Upaniṣadbrahmayogin's ability to unravel the esoteric Tantric language of the text.

His interpretation more often than not concurs in substance with Bhāskararāya's. They differ most profoundly on the inclusion of Kaula Tantric elements in Śrīvidyā practice. It seems clear that the secretive Tantric teachings of the Upaniṣad were well within the grasp of at least some within the community of noninitiate scholars. Further, at least some noninitiate anti-Kaula Vaidikas felt compelled to deal with the Upaniṣad as *śruti* despite its purported antinomianism. Like Upaniṣadbrahmayogin, these non-Tantrics could in some sense dissociate the *contents* of the text per se from the fact that it exists *in form* as part of revelation (*śruti*). The Upaniṣad's importance to Upaniṣadbrahmayogin is not merely that it has sound or mantric value as Veda or serves some other liturgical function. Rather, the Upaniṣad's very existence as a form of *śruti* demands attention.

A commentary attributed to the famous Vedānta philosopher Appaya Dīkṣita I (fl. 1585) is surely spurious though it is not altogether unlikely that another Appaya Dīkṣita did write such a commentary.[69] The commentary amounts to mere word glosses and adds nothing substantive to our understanding of the text. The commentary is important symbolically, however. It is yet another instance of a noninitiate commenting on a Vedic text that is Tantric in content. Unlike Upaniṣadbrahmayogin's work it does not offer a standard interpretation of the Upaniṣad that, for the most part, is shared by Tantrics and non-Tantrics alike. It appears that a later devotee may have thought it appropriate that the great Appaya Dīkṣita should have remarked on a nondualistic Śākta source since comparable attributions are made regarding other Śākta Upaniṣads, including the sister text of *Tripurā Upaniṣad,* the *Bhāvana Upaniṣad.* At most this commentary suggests that some non-Tantric Vaidikas sought to establish the importance of *Tripurā Upaniṣad* on intellectual grounds with a concurrent disregard for its Kaula Tantric concepts. However, the *Tripurā Upaniṣad*'s nondualism is at best only tangentially present, concealed as it were behind its explicitly Śākta Tantric ideology.

A commentary attributed to one Gaṅgācarana Vedāntavāgiśa is obscure in comparison to Appaya Dīkṣita's work.[70] The author's work is unfamiliar to any of the Śrīvidyā adepts in either North or South India with whom I have had contact.[71] From the list of other works attributed to this author, it would appear that this commentary, like that of Upaniṣadbrahmayogin, does not fall strictly within the purview of Śrīvidyā or Śākta Tantrism. Rather, it is another instance of a nondualist's interpretation of a theologically congenial work.[72]

A commentary attributed to one Rāmānanda, also known as Rāmānandatīrtha or Vācaspati, is the subject of much confusion and dispute within contemporary Śrīvidyā. The identification of the *Tripurā Upaniṣad*'s commentator with Rāmānandatīrtha who flourished circa 1650 should not be taken as a settled issue.[73] Rāmānanda's authorship is also attributed to a commentary on the *Tripurātāpinī Upaniṣad*, another Śākta Upaniṣad of the Śrīvidyā school. Both of these works come from the same hand. In the Adyar Library manuscript of Rāmānanda's commentary on *Tripurā Upaniṣad* he claims to be a Samayācārin. Not only does he frequently mention Lakṣmīdhara as an authority on Śrīvidyā, he quotes Lakṣmīdhara's entire gloss (*ṭīkā*) on the *Āruṇa Upaniṣad* (which appears within the *Lakṣmīdharī* on verse 11 of *Saundaryalaharī*) as part of his remarks on verse 5 of *Tripurā Upaniṣad*—though he fails, in this instance, to give a proper attribution.[74] It is the Upaniṣad's mention of five prohibited substances (*pañcamakāra*), the practice of the sexually explicit *kāmakalā* meditation, and the prominent role of external ritual (*bahiryāga*)—all positions that Lakṣmīdhara rejects as against the Veda (*avaidika*)—that causes confusion. Rāmānanda merely remarks that these practices are part of a tradition for those who are not Samaya Śrīvidyā worshippers. But why then would he, an avowed Samayin and an admirer of Lakṣmīdhara, consider composing commentaries on Kaula texts? He does not say. He does not openly condemn Kaula practices, though he does quote Lakṣmīdhara to say that Kaula worship is appropriate only for low caste (*śūdra*) practitioners.[75] The remaining possibility is that, like others, he composed a commentary on the grounds that the Upaniṣad is Vedic *śruti* of some sectarian or ideological importance in his day.

The ambiguity surrounding Rāmānanda's commentary leads one to question not only his precise affiliations but his understanding of Samayācāra interpretations. Clearly, Rāmānanda is less ideologically rigorous about the characteristics of an authoritative scripture. Important for our purposes is that a self-proclaimed orthodox Vaidika Samayācārin has engaged a Kaula-oriented Upaniṣad as *śruti*. Rāmānanda offers an instance that counters Lakṣmīdhara's implicit claim that Kaula elements necessarily disqualify scriptural attribution.[76] For Rāmānanda, in contrast to other Samayins, this Upaniṣad is not a forgery groping for legitimacy by claiming a Vedic status. Yet the whole situation remains puzzling considering the author's repeated use of Lakṣmīdhara's work and Lakṣmīdhara's own uncompromising positions.[77]

Bhāskararāya's is the best-known commentary on *Tripurā Upaniṣad.* It is a work that bears the marks of his mature scholarship. While the dates of certain of his works are fixed, the date of this commentary and his commentaries on the *Bhāvana* and *Kaula Upaniṣads* are not as precise. While he mentions himself that his *Saubhāgyabhāskara* commentary on the *Thousand Names of the Goddess Lalitā (Lalitāsahasranāma)*, his first major work, was completed in 1728 C.E., the *Setubandha* on the *Vāmakeśvaratantra* in Śaka 1655 (i.e., 1741 C.E.), and the *Guptavatī* on *Durgāsaptaśatī* in Saṃvat 1797 (i.e., 1740 C.E.), he gives no firm indication of the precise date of his Upaniṣad commentaries nor does he tell us why he selected these particular texts. His mention of these, and other not yet recovered works, within the Upaniṣad commentaries (and his failure to mention them elsewhere) suggests that he composed them late in his career—sometime after 1741 C.E. Further, we can surmise that he likely treated the Upaniṣads as a set of texts, that is, as works to be read together.[78] That he chose to comment on *Tripurā Upaniṣad* rather than on the similar but far more extensive *Tripurātāpinī Upaniṣad* is noteworthy. He does not hesitate to cite *Tripurātāpinī* (even within the *Tripurā* commentary) as an authoritative source for Śrīvidyā. As one contemporary Śrīvidyā adept said:

> It is most remarkable that Bhāskara[rāya] chose *Tripurā* [*Upaniṣad*] since one would suspect that if his interest were to explain external sacrifice (*bahiryāga*) as opposed to the internal sacrifice (*antaryāga*) taken up in the *Bhāvana Upaniṣad* then *Tripurātāpinī* would have been the more logical choice. We can only assume that this Upaniṣad was important to his lineage since he views it as a companion to the [important Kaula Śrīvidyā ritual source] *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra* as he says in the [*Tripurā*] commentary and that *Tripurātāpinī* was not considered in that way [within his tradition].[79]

The contemporary adept is correct in understanding that Bhāskararāya understands the *Tripurā* and *Bhāvana Upaniṣads* to deal with complimentary aspects of Śrīvidyā practice and interpretation, and that he considers *Tripurā Upaniṣad* to be the ritual companion of the well-known and influential *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra.*[80] Precisely why Bhāskararaāya took these positions is less clear. *Tripurā Upaniṣad* is not a text of ritual instruction per se, especially when compared to the *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra.* Clearly, it deals with the ritual elements of external rites (*bahiryāga*).

Further, there is no indication that Bhāskararāya thought of the text as liturgy to be recited within a larger Śrīvidyā ritual setting—as it often is used today by South Indian Śrīvidyā adepts.[81] *Tripurā Upaniṣad* is not the only Śākta Upaniṣad or Vedic *śruti* that is recited in Śrīvidyā rituals for its mantric and devotional value by contemporary adepts. *Bhāvana, Tripurātāpinī,* and *Devī Upaniṣads,* along with the so-called *Śrī Sūkta* of the *Ṛg Veda,* are among the Vedic *śruti* commonly appended for liturgical purposes to Śrīvidyā rituals in both Kaula and Samaya traditions. Thus, not only can *Tripurā Upaniṣad*'s contents be interpreted as dealing with external ritual matters (*bahiryāga*), the text itself can be seen as a ritual object in traditions that maintain both external and internal types of liturgy. While it is possible that Bhāskararāya may also have been familiar with the liturgical recitation of the Upaniṣad when he remarks that the text is a companion to the *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra,* his comments unambiguously refer the reader to its content.

It seems likely that Bhāskararāya chose this work, rather than the *Tripurātāpinī* or *Devī Upaniṣads,* in order to contrast its external ritual orientation with the internal worship (*antaryāga*) presented in the *Bhāvana Upaniṣad.* He also tells us that he wishes to establish a relationship between *Tripurā Upaniṣad* and the *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra.* The relationship of his *Tripurā* and *Bhāvana Upaniṣad* commentaries to his only other Upaniṣad commentary, the *Kaula Upaniṣadbhāṣya* Bhāskararāya does not fully explain. He does, however, suggest in *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya* that *Kaula Upaniṣad* provides the means by which one can correctly interpret Śrīvidyā's Kaula Tantric elements.[82]

Bhāskararāya's works, though historically recent, are no less significant as an authoritative presentation of Vaidika Tantrism. As a Śākta Tantric writer and as an authority on Śrīvidyā, he is best compared to the great Kashmiri Śaiva Tantric, Abhinavagupta: brilliantly erudite, vastly learned in all aspects of his tradition and in those of others and, moreover, encyclopedic in his references. Just as all Trika philosophy in Kashmiri Śaiva tradition must deal with Abhinavagupta, so Śrīvidyā tradition that follows Bhāskararāya must deal with his legacy. His work should not only be considered an important interpretation of past Śākta Tantric traditions because of its fair and thorough treatment of major concepts, it also serves as a bench mark for contemporary tradition.

Taken apart from any commentary, *Tripurā Upaniṣad* is at best esoteric and at worst utterly incomprehensible. Within Śrīvidyā, the Upaniṣad's appeal has not been limited to Kaula-oriented adepts. Rāmānanda's commentary indicates that Samayins have also taken an interest in the text.[83] Both *Tripurā Upaniṣad* and *Bhāvana Upaniṣad* have gained increasing popularity and importance in South Indian Śrīvidyā following the composition of Bhāskararāya's commentaries. There is little doubt that their significance for contemporary tradition is almost wholly the result of Bhāskararāya's efforts. Even Śrīvidyā adepts who distance themselves from Kaulism consider Bhāskararāya an authoritative and influential voice in their traditions. It is difficult to tell precisely when Tantrics outside Bhāskararāya's lineages began to be influenced by his works. The social, political, and technological changes in modern India have transformed the tradition dramatically: what were once secret and privately circulated documents are now matters of the public record and available in print. The advent of print technology has been an important factor in the development of recent Tantric tradition.[84]

From the perspective of the historian of religion, the Upaniṣad's questionable antiquity and its place in earlier forms of Śākta Tantrism do not detract from its importance as a source of Tantric thought. While its shifting subjects make for a less than perfectly coherent presentation, its contents raise crucial issues in Tantric tradition. Within the span of sixteen verse couplets nearly every major theme within Śākta Tantric tradition is raised, from the goddess's various forms to the role of mantras, meditation, and various rituals. As a Kaula-oriented text advocating the ritual use of wine, meat, sexual intercourse, and erotic meditation, *Tripurā Upaniṣad* deals with Tantrism's most radical doctrines and practices.

Unlike his commentary on *Bhāvana Upaniṣad* which emphasizes internal sacrifice (*antaryāga*) involving the symbolism of the *śrīcakra* or his independent treatise, *Varivasyārahasya* which focuses on the esoteric interpretations of the Śrīvidyā mantra, the *Tripurā Upaniṣad* raises both issues without specific or technical interpretations.[85] We must next address how the study of the text as a scripture within Vedic and Tantric traditions should proceed.

2 Studying the Text: Translating, Studying, and Interpreting Scripture

In order to translate and interpret the *Tripurā Upaniṣad* we must consider for whom it is a sacred text and what it would mean to call it "scripture." The distinction to be made is between the Upaniṣad as a document or as literature per se and as a scripture, that is, a text, oral or written, that is deemed sacred by groups or persons. William A. Graham's work on the orality of scripture has sharpened this discussion. He says:

> The study of a text as a document focuses on the historical background and the origin and growth of the text. The study of a text as scripture, on the other hand, focuses upon its contextual meaning, interpretation and use—that is, the ongoing role the text has played in a tradition, not only in formal exegesis, but in every sector of life. To put it succinctly, "scripture" is not a literary genre but a religiohistorical one, and it must be understood as such.[1]

He goes on to say that scriptures have a "relational quality," a key issue for our own investigation.

> This relational quality—or, if one prefers, contextual or functional quality—is of paramount importance for the study of scripture in the history of religion. Recognition of it is recognition that the significant "scriptural" characteristics of a text belong . . . to its role in a community and in individual lives.[2]

If a Tantric text such as *Tripurā Upaniṣad* is to be studied as scripture rather than as literature we must not only locate it in history but contextualize it within the community for whom it is significant. In the case of Tantric materials the situation is determined by a complex set of hermeneutical conditions. We should ask: What are the conditions under which Tantrics classify their scriptures differently from other Hindus? What factors would lead an "orthodox" Hindu to reject a text such as *Tripurā Upaniṣad?*

Tantric texts, and *Tripurā Upaniṣad* in particular, offer no exception to the relational character of scripture that Graham describes. The Upaniṣad, unlike the Tantras per se, is *śruti* and as such must be considered an oral text to be "heard."[3] This is not to say that traditionalists have refrained from dealing with it as a written text, rather that its mode of presentation and the context in which it is used will cause it to be treated and understood differently. For example, when it is an object of intellectual reflection and subject to written commentary it functions differently than if it is generated orally and used liturgically as a Vedic mantra. As a written (or oral) scripture that is examined for *content,* the Upaniṣad is an objectified form of knowledge that needs to be interpreted in order to be useful. Interpretation that takes a written form, however, is never finished but rather is treated as a part of a tradition of living, oral interpretations. Texts without oral interpretations are either inert or lacking in authority within lineages that do not preserve them.

In a different sense, and similar to its liturgical use, the written text may also function as a type of physical icon, that is, as an objectification of authority that does *not* require an examination of its contents to be significant. In fact, one could argue that understanding its content has little to do with its sacrality. Its physical form is itself the objectification of its content as Truth. Similarly, the oral recitation of the Upaniṣad is significant because it too has the *form* of revelation (*śruti*). In this situation also the Upaniṣad's meanings may be virtually irrelevant to the adept.[4] When used liturgically the Upaniṣad is pure mantra: an objectification of Truth as performative utterance. The very *sound* of the Upaniṣad is Truth, regardless of what it apparently says.

This performative, oral aspect of the Upaniṣad, so important to its use among contemporary Śrīvidyā adepts, is not Bhāskararāya's concern. It is clear, however, that he intends for written works to be augmented by oral interpretations. Since Tantric sources are not only composed in obscure and technical language but *presuppose* oral interpretation and/or other forms of commentary, their interpretation as well as their historical status in the Hindu canon depends upon the vitality of tradition. While Bhāskararāya's commentary is one historical instantiation of traditional written instruction, it presupposes knowledge that is not Tantric per se. Beyond a familiarity with the extremely technical and nuanced language of the Tantric tradition, Bhāskararāya assumes fluency in the traditions of Sanskrit grammar (*vyākaraṇa*), ritual interpretation (*mīmāṃsā),* theology (*siddhānta*), and philosophy (*darśana*). The Tantric adept, we are led to conclude, must also be a master of exoteric arts and sciences.

Bhāskararāya also supposes that his readers are familiar with his other works, including his exceptionally complex interpretation of the *Vāmakeśvara Tantra,* the *Setubandha,* and his technical masterpiece on mantric theory, the *Varivasyārahasya.* In short, his style suggests that he had an extremely limited audience in mind—one consisting almost entirely of his own disciples, who would surely have had access to his other works and to his oral explanations.

To consider a Tantric text as scripture we must establish its canonical relations with other texts—Tantric and non-Tantric—in light of its categorization and treatment. But, more important, we must acknowledge that a critical treatment cannot exclude those for whom it is scripture. We must be exceedingly cautious, however, not to confuse the scholarly task of an exegesis of the Upaniṣad with the theological agenda of those for whom it is sacred word.

The exegetical process has at least two stages. First, we must accept the fact that without an informed guide making creative decisions involving word meanings, the interpretation of doctrines and symbolism, and the appropriate contextual sense of concepts and formulations, it is impossible to arrive at any understanding or rendering of the text *in Sanskrit*. The leap from an interpretive understanding of the meanings of esoteric Sanskrit vocabulary to English or any other language is yet *another,* second stage in the interpretive process.

To obtain a rendering of the text that is acceptable to traditionalists one need not *be* a Śrīvidyā adept, as certain traditionalists may believe. When one gathers traditional oral commentary, often in several languages at a time, the translation process involves an enormous degree of conceptual latitude and interpretation for both scholar and adept.

However, interpretations based solely on written accounts will misrepresent the tradition and separate us further from understanding the text as scripture by appearing incomplete, misleading, and even utterly nonsensical to the initiated adept.[5] This is not to say that one should rely *solely* on the interpretations of initiated adepts or that a "correct" interpretation of the text can be achieved by creating a consensus from a committee of initiate-scholars. While the understanding of adepts is indispensible to any rendering of the text, it is also liable to reflect the interpretive biases, idiosyncracies, and intellectual abilities of individuals and of lineage traditions. To collect a variety of opinions from as many interpreters as possible would conceivably produce either a consensus interpretation that represents no one traditional view of the text, or such a large number of translations and interpretations as to render the task unmanageable. These problems, of course, are predicated on a no less formidable scholarly undertaking: one must acquire secret esoteric teaching from scholar-initiates who usually limit their instruction to those within their lineage. As we have noted earlier, these and other related methodological obstacles have foreshadowed previous scholarly efforts.[6]

When we say that Tantric texts, like scriptures in religious traditions, should be viewed relationally we do not mean that they are utterly relative. Texts do not mean whatever we would like them to say. Rather, it is a matter of coming to terms with how ideas might be accurately, rather than literally, represented. The distinction between the scholar of Tantrism and the Tantric adept is profound on this point: to the scholar, texts and their historical interpretations are entirely human artifacts that should be understood as elements within a structure of religious and social history. The sacred nature of the text, then, is not a quality of it but of the way it has been treated vis-à-vis other comparable religious artifacts.

As I engaged Tantric adepts to read and comment upon Bhāskararāya's *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya* some offered only minimal assistance, put off by the possibility of revealing secret meanings to the uninitiated. The vast majority of contemporary adepts, however, were not only helpful but enthusiastic supporters of the endeavor. As one scholar said:

> The time has come to make information about our traditions more available. This does not mean opening the doors to anyone who wishes to practice. That is different. It is time to dispel the misconceptions about our practices.
>
> Our books are now publicly available, we must respond or else be further misunderstood. Our secrets will not be violated by telling the truth about ourselves.[7]

Having gained access to traditionalists' opinions the scholar is left with the unsettled issue of how to decide which interpretation offers an accurate understanding of the text. The traditionalist cited above was not deeply concerned with the revelation of Tantric ideas or practices, which he insisted remained more or less inert without proper initiation but rather with the social consequences of being labeled a Tantric. To be a Tantric, he noted, suggests moral degeneration. While others may interpret the text to suit their own standards, for him there was only one correct interpretation for members of *his* lineage.

Finally, determining which interpretation of the text is "correct" remains a matter of scholarly judgment. Since consensus interpretation takes one farther away from any historical instantiation of the text as "scripture," one must weigh more heavily the opinions of some adepts rather than others. In this case I have considered particularly the opinions of two particular scholar-initiates; their insights, I determined, represented the most plausible and intellectually well-informed understanding of the text available to me.[8] Reading *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya* with a critical appreciation of Bhāskararāya's other works, I have not always followed these adepts' interpretations but have sought to incorporate what the commentator has said elsewhere and what he means to say as he engages his tradition's scripture.

Scripture's relational quality requires the critical reader to engage a text in two distinctively different ways. First, one must define and classify the texts (oral or written) comparatively within a broad tradition: an understanding of scripture depends on a typology of the "word" and its canonization. Thus, scripture must be appreciated as a human artifact whose sacred quality or qualities are not inherent but constructed in social history. Second, one must deal with a scripture's sacred nature in relation to other types of sacred objects, such as icons, rituals, or other signs and in contrast with other texts (and objects) that are not similarly treated. The point is that we must not arbitrarily limit our understanding of scripture merely to that which is read. Scripture, as Graham has shown, is not merely holy writ.[9] This is but one of its dimensions. Rather, we must deal with how it functions within a particular historical setting because of what people believe it to *be*.

Unlike the theologian who is interested in discovering what sacred characteristics it intrinsically bears, the historian of religion is concerned only with how scriptures function and relate to other phenomena in the comparative structure of socioreligious perceptions. The present study seeks not only to retrieve Bhāskararāya's opinions and ideas but to engage them through persons for whom they are important—and who can be said to represent the community of Bhāskararāya's intellectual peers.[10] Rather than include non-Tantrics in the interpretive process of reading the Upaniṣad as *śruti,* I have deliberately chosen to create a reading that at least some within the contemporary Vaidika Tantric tradition would recognize. The point is that scriptural characteristics of *Tripurā Upaniṣad,* like those of scriptures in other religious traditions, do not belong to the text but to its role in community and in individual lives. This premise is the foundational hermeneutic principle of the present study. The location of the text within Hindu tradition is a matter of how it is engaged and who engages it.

Reading the text not only as part of a literary tradition but as scripture within the Śrīvidyā school is the next step in our study. While this effort is hardly exhaustive, it is a beginning for future studies of Tantric texts and theology by historians of religion. As Jonathan Z. Smith writes,

> . . . a prime object of study for the historian of religion ought to be theological tradition, taking the term in its widest sense, in particular those elements that are concerned with canon and exegesis. That is to say, bracketing any presuppositions as to its character as revelation (and from this question, the historian of religion must abstain), the radical and arbitrary redirection represented by the notion of canon and the ingenuity represented by the rule-governed exegetical enterprise of applying the canon to every dimension of human life is the most characteristic, persistent, and obsessive religious activity. It is, at the same time, the most profoundly cultural, and hence, the most illuminating for what ought to be the essentially anthropological view of the historian of religion and a conception of religion as human labor. The application as well as the judgement of the relative adequacy of particular applications to a community's life situation remains the indigenous theologian's task, but the study of the process, particularly the study of comparative systematics and exegesis, ought to become a major preoccupation of the historian of religion.[11]

3 Reading the Text

Introducing Śākta Tantrism through a Scripture

The use of a particular text to introduce major themes within the catholic Tantric tradition is bound by certain constraints. Foremost is that no single text will necessarily be considered scripture by all Tantrics—either in whole or in part. A given primary text may itself maintain a sectarian view; it may express limited interpretations of broader and more complex issues raised in the larger tradition. Further, a commentary on a primary text renders partial its *own* sectarian tradition. In the present case we must at times also refer to Bhāskararāya's other works in order to develop an accurate picture of his views. A commentator may espouse views taken to be normative that are treated very differently elsewhere within the sect's scriptures or by other commentators. We cannot and should not assume consistency of interpretation within a historically diverse sectarian tradition.

The historical interpreter is to some extent constrained by the subject matter of the primary (or root-, *mūla*) text since he must explicate the scripture rather than simply relay his own independent views. In the case of Bhāskararāya we might also suppose that he trained most of the text's initial intended audience himself, that is, at least as far as Śrîvidyā Tantrism is concerned. Clearly, the author never intended his Tantric works to reach an audience of noninitiates. Though he lived in a period in which the technology and resources of his age would have offered him a wider audience, Bhāskararāya is not interested in reaching beyond his small circle of adepts. As a Hindu traditionalist writing in Sanskrit, he works within a very limited Indian context; as a Tantric writing only for other Tantrics, he exhibits no interest in matters outside this setting.[1]

We will emphasize Bhāskararāya's engagement with *Tripurā Upaniṣad* as a "whole," that is, as a "scripture" within a Tantric canon, and as a series of specific teachings that contribute to the conceptual body of his tradition. The second task forms the substance of the interpretive exegesis that follows; a more thorough consideration of Bhāskararāya's notion of the role of scripture within Tantric tradition is left to the Conclusion. To study Bhāskararāya's Śrīvidyā, however, we must first define and classify the broader tradition with which he identifies.

The Śrīvidyā School: Defining and Classifying Śāktism and Tantrism

The Śrīvidyā school locates itself within the much larger traditions of goddess worship or Śāktism and Hindu Tantrism. While Śāktism and Tantrism are closely aligned historically, they are not identical. The Śrīvidyā school becomes identifiable as a body of oral teachings from the period of its initial emergence and diffusion, perhaps as early as the fourth or fifth centuries. By the sixth century, elements of Śrīvidyā in written form are present in the work of Tirumūlar, a Śaiva mystic (*siddha*) writing in Tamil.[2] Tirumūlar's reference may also provide the earliest written record of explicit Hindu Tantric teaching. The extent to which Tirumūlar's suggestive remarks represent a developed sectarian form of Śākta Tantrism is yet to be determined. Śrīvidyā, like most Sanskrit-based forms of Hindu Tantrism, certainly predates its first systematic literary presentations in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[3]

Before venturing further into the nuances of the sect's history and theology, it is important to offer operative general definitions of Śāktism and Tantrism. The two are not mutually inclusive terms. The basic difference between them provides a critical conceptual distinction. While Tantrism is best understood as a general set of principles, concepts, and practices, Śāktism is but one theological format in which Tantric elements are expressed. Teun Goudriaan has put forth a definition of Śāktism and circumscribed its relationship to Tantrism:

> Śāktism is defined in different ways. . . . Sometimes it is incorrectly identified with "the cult of female deities in general". . . . It can be shortly characterized as the worship of Śakti . . . i.e., the universal and all-embracing dynamis which manifests itself in human experience as a female divinity. To this should be added that inseparably connected with her is an inactive male partner as whose power of action and movement the Śakti functions. . . . It is therefore not enough to say that a Śākta worships the female as ultimate principle; nor is it

> correct categorically to state that Śāktism is characterized by the use of the five ["prohibited substances" known as] *makāras*. . . . Like "Tantrism", "Śāktism" is sometimes also used in a wider meaning. It makes sense to distinguish an "independent" from a "dependent" variety. . . . In the latter case, the Śakti(s) is (are) worshipped within the fold of another denomination (like Vaiṣṇavism or Jainism) without constituting the essence of its creed and practice, while in the Śākta sect proper the Śakti is the chief divinity. Although Śāktism is often defined also by means of typical ritual practices, it is advisable to restrict the use of this term for a world view oriented towards Śakti, while Tantrism should be applied to a conglomerate of ritual and yogic practices and presuppositions.[4]

Goudriaan makes clear that not all Śāktas are Tantrics and that Tantrism, unlike Śāktism, is not restricted to any one Hindu denomination, or even to any single Indian religious tradition. Śāktas, in their specific sectarian formulations, may focus on beneficent or horrific aspects of the goddess, or both. These aspects of the goddess appear in any number of names and forms.

At the "entry level" Tantrics identify the goddesses of particular interest to them with the goddesses of classical Hindu mythology, regional folklore, and popular belief. Tantrics then add other features to these exoteric figures. While not all names and forms of the goddess as they appear in the Purāṇic literature are significant in Tantric Śāktism, deities with Tantric significance either have clearly developed identities in the larger Hindu mythological (*purāṇa*) traditions or are present in the popular traditions of Hindu worship. Often popular Hindu deities acquire Tantric interpretations as ancillary figures in the Śākta's ritual pantheon.

Tantrism entails specific forms of *sādhana* or spiritual discipline, the Sanskrit term taken from the verbal root √*sadh* or √*sidh*, meaning to accomplish or to conquer. Tantric *sādhana* is not one form of spiritual discipline but, more precisely, a class of disciplines and concepts which gain their Tantric identity when grouped together. In the most general sense, a Tantric spiritual discipline (*sādhana*) is defined as a systematic quest for worldly prosperity, empowerment, and final liberation by esoteric means. These esoteric means include the recitation of sacred sounds (mantras), the use of gestures (*mudrās*), the identification of sounds and deities with the body (*nyāsa*), and the application of these and other elements, especially *yoga* and philosophical inquiry, in practical and ritualized forms of contemplative worship (*pūjā* or *upāsana*) requiring specialized initiation (*dīkṣā*).[5]

The description and explanation of *sādhana,* or of some aspect of *sādhana,* is the principal feature of Tantric texts. While Tantric literature includes discussion of speculative issues such as cosmology, cosmogony, and metaphysics, these matters are closely tied to practical and especially ritual concerns. Śākta Tantric sources in particular place their discussion of speculative matters almost entirely in ritual and yogic contexts. Philosophical inquiry combining with practical ritualism, such as one commonly finds in the works of Abhinavagupta and other Kashmiri Tantrics, is relatively uncommon in Śākta Tantric writings. Generally, theological or speculative inquiry within Tantric sources is viewed as part of the broader interpretation of one's practical *sādhana* or it is assumed and therefore is not discussed.

While not all Śākta Tantrics agree, Bhāskararāya and other intellectuals consider abstract philosophical inquiry to be part of the *sādhana* of liberative knowledge (*jñāna*). However, all Tantric intellectuals emphasize that *sādhana* must involve more than the acquisition of a correct intellectual understanding of ultimate truth. It requires both correct understanding (*jñāna* per se) *and* active ritual participation leading the aspirant to experiential knowledge (*bhāvanajñāna*).[6]

Śākta Tantric theology, in classical Indian philosophical terms, espouses a peculiar form of *samuccayavāda* or "combination doctrine." *Samuccayavāda* is the doctrine that final liberation (*mokṣa*) must involve a combination of knowledge (*jñāna*) and action (*karma*), including specialized forms of ritual performance.[7] This position distinguishes Śākta Tantrics from the non-Tantric *kevalādvaita* or nondualism of Śaṅkara and his followers. Śākta Tantrics can be aligned more closely to the so-called Difference-and-Identity school (*bhedābheda*) of Bhāskara the Vedāntin.[8] According to the Tantric, neither knowledge—of which intellectual inquiry is but one type—nor active involvement in ritual (or any other type of action) will by itself insure liberation. Tantric combination doctrine, however, does give clear priority to knowledge (*jñāna*) as *the* salvific force. Rituals have no liberative efficacy except as part of a pattern of contemplative worship (*upāsana*) in which the aspirant acquires a direct experience (*anubhava*) of the Absolute (*brahman*).

Bhāskararāya distinguishes contemplative worship (*upāsana*), which includes ritual but which is directed towards the acquisition of personal insight (*anubhava*), from ritual per se. Commenting on *Kaula Upaniṣad,* which states that "knowledge is the cause of liberation" (*jñānaṃ mokṣaikāranaṃ*), Bhāskararāya says he will refrain from "unnecessary elaboration." The meaning, he says resolutely, is clear. He remarks later in the same commentary that liberative knowledge is not merely a release from the bonds of individual ignorance (*anvamala*) but a positive experience of the Absolute. Elsewhere, posed in the guise of a classic nondualist theologian, he says, "Obtaining that [knowledge (*jñāna*) which is not different from one's true Self (*ātman*)] means the blossoming of knowledge as the extinction of ignorance."[9]

Abhinavagupta writing in a different context summarizes the Tantric view when he remarks, "For knowledge to be fulfilled it must emanate from texts [*śāstra*], from the investigation with a wise teacher, and directly from oneself."[10]

Tantric spiritual discipline (*sādhana*) entails both existential insight and active involvement at physical, verbal, and mental levels. For Tantrics such as those in the Śrīvidyā school, *sādhana* often includes (and sometimes requires) a combination of theological education and specific forms of ritual discipline. However, the role or the necessity of theological education is a matter of controversy among Tantrics. While some, such as Bhāskararāya, suggest that it is vital for developing an effective *sādhana,* others maintain that it is tangential and possibly detrimental to the acquisition of knowledge (*jñāna*) as a personal experience (*anubhava*) of ultimate truth.[11] As Abhinavagupta says, the sources which authenticate experiential knowledge are threefold: scripture (*āgama* or *śāstra*), the word of the guru (*yukti,* or reasoning), and one's own experience (*pratyakṣa*).[12]

In sum, Tantric theology is not distinguished from non-Tantric traditions by its emphasis on the achievement of a personal insight through a combination of knowledge and ritual action. Rather, Tantrics are different from non-Tantrics by the types of disciplines (*sādhana*) they employ to reach these common Hindu goals.

Tantric *sādhana* is twofold, described as "external" and "internal" types of sacrifice (*yāga*). Simply put, this means that most Tantric disciplines specify types of external ritual, including the use of material substances (such as water, fire, and, in the Tantric case, wine, meat, etc.,) and internal, contemplative acts, (such as the recitation of mantras). Further, Tantric rituals, through a variety of yogic practices, transform external objects into symbolic counterparts. While this discussion of external and internal sacrifice (and this specific vocabulary) does not arise in every sect or with the frequency it does within the Śrīvidyā school, the basic concepts are common to all Hindu Tantrics.

Tantric *sādhana* does not necessarily require outward forms of physical, mental, and verbal discipline: it may be a purely contemplative and symbolic approach to ritual action. External sacrifice (*bahiryāga*) involves observable actions involving complicated liturgies and ritual substances, as well as the incorporation of specific types of physical yoga, meditation, and symbology. Internal sacrifice (*antaryāga*) concentrates on transforming the same external elements and substances into purely contemplative acts and mental images with esoteric significance.

In Śrīvidyā the discussion of internal and external sacrifice does not center on which of the two forms of practice is superior. Like all Tantrics, Śrīvidyā adepts agree that external rites must be gradually internalized. Rather, the discussion focuses on the issue of whether internalization and the transformation of external objects into their subtle counterparts gradually supplant the injunctions for external rites. Bhāskararāya argues, like most Tantrics, that external disciplines should never be completely forsaken. Ritual acts have a transformative effect on both behavior and understanding. The external forms of practice are gradually transformed by contemplation. Forsaking all external rituals, he says, can lead to confusion, lethargy, or self-complacence. A still worse situation arises when the absence of a visible discipline creates a bad example for others less accomplished and still in need of religious examples.

Lakṣmīdhara and the Samayācārins, however, advocate the complete relinquishment of external ritual substances and other elements of outward discipline. Contemplative ritual acts, however, are not eliminated nor is action itself denied a role in the path to liberation. Rather than forsake action (*karma*) in favor of knowledge (*jñāna*), the Samayins interpret action to be a form of knowledge.[13] Thus, actions whether they are internal or external, complement and combine with abstract theological formulations. Lakṣmīdhara emphasizes the substitution of symbolic counterparts for external images and ritual prescriptions; this internalization alone, he says, effects liberation.

Tantric interpretations of external and internal sacrifice, however, do not distinguish them clearly from non-Tantric ones. Tantric discussions of ritual, knowledge, and the role of human action closely parallel discussions in non-Tantric traditions. The matter of external/internal sacrifice, for example, can be seen as a continuation of the long-standing dispute between Vedic ritualists committed to the efficacy of sacrifice in itself and Upaniṣadic seers committed to knowledge or contemplative yoga. Thus, however important the discussion of internal and external sacrifice in

Tantric *sādhana* may be for understanding Tantrism, it is not a unique feature of Tantric traditions.

Defining Tantrism, however, as a type of *sādhana* redirects us to a more precise method for determining Tantrism's characteristic features. We can approach the problems involved in defining Tantrism by reconsidering the term "Tantric" as a classification. "Tantric" is a taxon within the more broadly construed phenomenon we identify as Hinduism.[14] We should then ask: Can "Tantric" as a term for classifying certain texts, individuals, or traditions within Hinduism be understood by resorting to a single principle of differentiation? That is to say, should Tantrism be classified monothetically? Can we determine a *sine qua non* for Tantrism—a "that without which" something Tantric would not be itself?

Developing a monothetic classification proves problematic. Not only is it doubtful that unique features exist for catholic Hindu Tantrism, but the very pursuit of a monothetic mode of classification may lead us to a serious misunderstanding of Tantric phenomena. For example, if one suggests that the key Tantric feature is the use of radical or socially antinomian rituals in *sādhana,* specifically *pañcamakāra* and *kāmakalā* meditation, then we must exclude Lakṣmīdhara and the Samayācārins. The result is that our classification becomes too narrow and fails to account for all the evidence. Despite their protestations, the Samayācārins, in both theory and practice, are more like other Tantrics than they are like non-Tantric Hindus. Samayins retain many distinctive Tantric traits, including admission of non-twice-born initiates into their fold, despite their interpretation of Śrīvidyā as a wholly Vedic *sādhana.*

If we look to a characteristic that occurs in every instance in Tantrism, such as a special initiation (*dīkṣā*) obtained from a guru or the doctrines involving ritual and knowledge or internal/external *sādhana,* then the category becomes too broad. Non-Tantric Hindu traditions may also require a type of specialized initiation. Since no one feature alone suffices to distinguish Tantrics from non-Tantrics, we can assert that no single differentia exists to classify a phenomenon as "Tantric." Thus, monothetic classification is impossible.

A more useful and accurate method for understanding the class of Tantric phenomena is to view the concept as a polythetic classification in which a "large (but unspecified) number of properties or characteristics are possessed by a 'large number' of class members."[15] The method is akin to looking for a set of family resemblances by which one identifies a given member. Thus, a Tantric phenomenon may retain certain necessary criteria for admission to the class but no longer possess sufficient criteria. In other words, Tantric phenomena need not possess *all* the defining characteristics of the taxon "Tantric," and there is no a priori justification for deciding that any single characteristic is the most definitive. "Tantric" characteristics fall within the broader definitional properties we recognize as "Hindu," but when taken as a unified, polythetic class such characteristics provide a way of distinguishing the Tantric from the non-Tantric Hindu.

Identifying a Tantric by self-designation also proves inadequate. Unlike in the case of Hinduism, in which self-reference to "the Veda" specifies the class of Hindus, in the case of the adjective "Tantric," meaning one who identifies with the Tantra, the same method proves insufficient. It is here we see the value of using a polythetic classification: a Tantric phenomenon need not call itself "Tantric" to be Tantric. A text, tradition, or individual need only possess a significant number of those characteristics that define Tantrism as a polythetic class. This method will allow us to classify those arch-conservative Samayācārins, who do not call themselves Tantrics, as Tantric. Further, it accounts for conservative Kaula Tantric adepts who sometimes dissociate themselves from the term Tantric because it suggests a *sādhana* involving moral lassitude or "black magic." An aversion to using the term Tantric on the part of many contemporary Śrīvidyā adepts should not prevent us from calling them Tantrics—despite colloquial meanings or historical connotations.[16]

A polythetic classification, then, is statistical method inasmuch as it admits that Hindu Tantrics must possess a large number of Tantric characteristics that may be shared individually by many non-Tantric Hindus. Deciding which characteristics make up the Tantric taxonomy is the scholar's decision. The success of the method will rest largely on scholarly judgments. We should emphasize, however, that the procedure should not be idiosyncratic even if it is, in an important and positive sense, reductionist. There need only be a general agreement about which generic characteristics are present in the majority of cases. As Jonathan Z. Smith observes, much depends on the precision with which we resolve the questions regarding what constitutes a "large (but unspecified)" number of properties and a "large number" of individuals. Our effort concentrates on applying the polythetic mode of classification in order to relate generic Tantric characteristics to a specific case.

I will avoid making a statistical study here and instead focus on how a preliminary definition and classification of Hindu Tantric phenomena might begin. The crucial point is that Tantric characteristics are *not* unique with respect to other Hindu forms of thought and practice; while Tantrism has no essence and no singular feature, it can nevertheless be defined and classified in a way that distinguishes the Tantric from the non-Tantric. One need only demonstrate that a given phenomenon possesses a large number of the properties identified as either necessary or common features of the Tantric class.

Tantric schools, such as Śrīvidyā, also develop sets of properties that distinguish them internally from other Tantrics. Some of these distinguishing properties, such as Śrīvidyā's *śrīvidyā* mantra, *are* unique inasmuch as they form a subclass within a larger class of generic phenomena, namely, the class of all mantras used by Tantrics and, more broadly, by Hindus. Sectarian Tantric schools are internally polythetic, that is, not all members of the school possess (or must possess) all of the school's defining characteristics to be a part of the sectarian tradition.[17]

Śrīvidyā is exemplary of the synthetic structure of Tantrism and of the usefulness of polythetic classification. It shares basic elements of Tantrism and Śākta theology and so distinguishes itself from non-Tantric and non-Śākta forms of Hinduism. Yet within the Śākta Tantric class, it creates an identity by providing distinctive symbolic components that follow generic patterns. For example, Śrīvidyā's ritual use of initiation (*dīkṣā*), sound formulations (mantras), and complex diagrams (*yantra*s, literally, "machines"), are common Śākta Tantric features. Śrīvidyā's particular forms of initiation, mantra, and yantra provide its theological identity and create a basis for understanding the sect as a bounded religious community.

Goudriaan, Padoux, and other scholars have developed lists of descriptive and theoretical criteria that, with certain qualifications, describe the key generic characteristics of Hindu Tantrism. However, because these generic features are the taxa of the polythetic class "Tantric," they do not apply in every case, as our present study of Śrīvidyā demonstrates. Further, as Jonathan Z. Smith has shown in the case of Judaism, though certain characteristics must apply in all cases, other features are less frequent. A single necessary criterion, which in this case includes, for example, forms of initiation (*dīkṣā*), will not suffice to distinguish the Tantric from the non-Tantric.

As descriptive criteria, the generic features of Hindu Tantrism outline those characteristics that most consistently appear in a large number of sectarian traditions. However, they may also appear within the larger class of phenomena we identify as "Hindu." In other words, non-Tantrics may bear several features that collectively distinguish Tantrism. When taken as a *whole class* of phenomena, however, these descriptive criteria provide a definition of the Tantric vis à vis the non-Tantric. Classifying Tantrism will further enable us to differentiate one sectarian form of Tantrism from another. As noted, Tantric schools, such as Śrīvidyā, create specific and sometimes unique forms of generic concepts and practices. These we will investigate further below.[18]

The principal generic features of Hindu Tantrism shared across sectarian lines involve both speculative and practical elements. All Tantrics characteristically combine theoretical and intellectual concepts with practical ritual formulations and prescriptions. The following ten points briefly summarize and augment our description of Tantric *sādhana.*

1. *Tantric texts and traditions are "extra-Vedic" despite the opinion of certain writers, such as Bhāskararāya, that Tantric sources are simply an extension of Vedic traditions. Tantric sources are not part of the conventional canon of Hindu scriptures. Rather, they are "additional" and esoteric both as a canon of Hindu sources and as a class of practices, concepts, and traditions.*

Tantric texts and traditions often claim to supersede conventional sources of the Vedic legacy as the most appropriate means to salvation in the degenerate *kaliyuga*. Tantrics treat their texts as special, *additional* aids for the disciplined religious life. Therefore, not everyone qualified by birth to study the Vedas meets the additional, extra-Vedic requirements for Tantric initiation, practice, and study. This does not necessarily require the Tantric to reject the texts, traditions, or practices of exoteric Hinduism but rather to subordinate them, either as separate or inferior forms of *sādhana.*

Some Hindu Tantrics, by making explicit their desire to create an alternative to established sources, openly question the usefulness and efficacy of conventional Hindu texts and tradition. For these more anti-establishment Tantrics, Tantric *sādhana* is anti-Vedic in the sense of rendering other forms of Hindu tradition practically useless for obtaining one's religious aims. Schools of Tantrism more deeply rooted in brāhmaṇical Hinduism prefer instead to treat Tantric *sādhana* as deliberately hidden within the Vedas.

Thus, we observe that Tantric sources are esoteric in two ways. In one sense, they conceal teachings and prevent those who do not qualify from entering into the community. In another sense, they create a particular communal identity that bestows on the Tantric a sense of privilege. Tantric language, concepts, and specific prescriptions not only prevent the uninitiated from gaining access but create an elitist community based on interpretation and practice. Tantrism is not only extra-Vedic in doctrinal, textual, and prescriptive terms; as a type of religious virtuosity it extends beyond the ordinary boundaries of the Vedic understanding of community. Tantrics in this way form selective groups, or to put it in Tantric terms, create "family" (*kula*) that qualitatively distinguishes itself through sectarian formulations of the catholic Tantric tradition.

While Tantric esotericism is also linked to notions of personal transformation on the part of the aspirant and to secret initiation (see point 6 below), Tantric texts are themselves esoteric quite apart from their traditional interpretation. In the case of the Hindu Śākta Tantras written in Sanskrit, the language is highly esoteric. It is, however, more technical than poetic or metaphorical, as is often the case in the "twilight language" (*sandhābhāṣa*) of Buddhist Tantra or the upside-down (*ulaṭbāṃsī*) vernacular of writers such as Kabīr.[19] Thus Hindu Tantric texts are extra-Vedic in the sense of being written in an esoteric vocabulary that is radically different from that of conventional, exoteric texts. Tantrics not only give words specialized meanings but coin new ones. Further, Tantric commentators are free to eschew conventional methods of explication both in style and method. In other words, Tantrism is extra-Vedic not only in content but also, in an important sense, in the form of its teaching and transmission.

2. *Tantrism teaches special forms of yoga and spiritual discipline, including the quasi-physiological kuṇḍalinī yoga likewise based on esoteric formulations and instructions.*[20]

Kuṇḍalinī yoga is a discipline distinctly different from Patañjali's classical yoga. As an extension of the traditions of *hāṭha* yoga, it is an especially important aspect of Tantric spiritual discipline (*sādhana*). *Kuṇḍalinī* yoga involves activating the latent spiritual power or *kuṇḍalinī* within the individual and guiding it through the channels (*nāḍī*) and psychophysical centers or *cakras* which constitute the "subtle" human body. The aim of *kuṇḍalinī* yoga is to effect a physical, verbal, and mental transformation of one's entire being through disciplines that activate the latent divinity which resides in the human body.

The process of awakening *kuṇḍalinī* and the details regarding its quasi-physical components are variously described in Tantric sources. For example, the exact number of the bodily centers or *cakras* through which *kuṇḍalinī* passes on its journey from the base of the spine to the vault of the skull differs according to the prescriptions of sectarian Tantric schools. The usual number for the body's main spiritual centers is six, beginning with the *mūlādhāra cakra* at the base of the spine and continuing up to the *ājñā cakra* located between the eyebrows. The topmost center called the "thousand-petalled lotus" (*sahasradalapadma*) is, technically speaking, not considered a *cakra* but rather the seat (*pīṭha*) on which Śakti (as *kuṇḍalinī*) is reunited with the already seated Śiva. To this commonly shared Tantric *cakra* theory and imagery, Śrīvidyā and others add three more *cakras* to bring the total (nine) in line with other symbolic elements in the doctrinal scheme.[21] The diagram on the yogic centers (see Appendix 1) outlines the basic pattern as it is discussed in sources on *kuṇḍalinī* yoga. The location and names of the three additional *cakras* discussed in Śrīvidyā sources are also marked, as are the positions of the right (*piṅgala*) and left (*iḍā*) channels that parallel the central (*suṣumṇā*) channel through which *kuṇḍalinī* passes.[22]

Bhāskararāya, following the prescriptions of the *Yoginīhṛdaya*, elaborates on the basic *cakra* pattern and adds nine more "very secret" centers. These nine extra centers begin just above the *ājñā cakra* and continue up to the thousand-petalled lotus. We can locate them physically between the center located at the "third eye" and the vault of the skull.[23]

The *cakras* of the "subtle" body are systematically identified with sounds and deities specially invoked from within the adept's body. These internal forms of divinity located within the human body correspond to external deities that preside over various parts of the universe. Through yogic practices, including breath control, mental concentration, and the use of sound formulas (mantras), the body's vital forces (*prāṇa*) are stirred and channeled throughout the 72,000 channels (*nāḍī*) of the subtle body. These various physical, mental, and verbal efforts cause the goddess in the form of latent spiritual potential or *kuṇḍalinī* to awaken and begin her journey upward, passing through each of the subtle body's *cakras* and through three "knots" (*grantha*) identified with the gods Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Rudra (i.e., Śiva) on her way towards the thousand-petalled lotus (*sahasradalapadma*).

Envisaged in the form of a serpent asleep in the *mūlādhāra cakra* at the base of the spine, *kuṇḍalinī* is aroused by both yogic discipline and ritual action. In each stage the yogi acquires a different set of accomplishments (*siddhi*) and becomes increasingly more powerful, capable of affecting natural and social environments as well as seen and unseen realities. The awakening of *kuṇḍalinī* occurs over the course of a protracted *sādhana* of physical and mental disciplines.[24] For Tantrics, the practice of *kuṇḍalinī* yoga, and its physical counterpart *hāṭha* yoga, is but one vital and distinctive element in a much larger *sādhana*. Certainly no Tantric believes there can be progress in one's *sādhana* without the awakening of *kuṇḍalinī*.

While *kuṇḍalinī*'s initial sojourns at the various bodily centers are temporary and controlled by a ritual process of excitation and pacification, her awakening gradually becomes a permanent condition. The adept who has fully aroused *kuṇḍalinī* achieves liberation-while-yet-living (*jīvanmukti*). Such an adept is believed to have completed the reunification of Śakti with Śiva or, in philosophical terms, the soul (*ātman*) with the Absolute (*brahman*).[25] According to some Tantrics, the full awakening of *kuṇḍalinī* also brings bodily immortality. Śrīvidyā adepts usually eschew the discussion of bodily immortality but reiterate that the properly aroused *kuṇḍalinī* confers innumerable worldly benefits and spiritual powers—including longevity and sound health. They warn, however, that one who is ill-equipped or not properly trained in *kuṇḍalinī* yoga can expect life-threatening consequences, including disease and insanity. Further, since *kuṇḍalinī* arises in stages, the attainment of final liberation may not occur over the course of a single birth. Thus, liberation is spoken of as five distinct levels or stages of realization. (These are further discussed below.)

3. *Tantrics are at once theists and philosophical nondualists. For Tantrics, the Absolute Brahman is God, who is at once both One and Many. The Absolute is embodied in both material and efficient forms as the deities and demigods of the Hindu pantheon. The "gods" exist as both macrocosmic independent realities and in microcosmic forms within the human body as aspects of the adept's spiritual personality.*

Unlike other Hindus who invoke divinities from "outside," Tantrics focus their theological and practical attentions on identifying the divine, macrocosmic aspects of reality with their intrinsic microcosmic counterparts. The Tantric's aim is to make the divine realities a part of the individual's experience as the essence of body, speech, and mind. Just as all the diverse spiritual and material forms in the universe are but aspects of God (the Absolute Brahman), so the microcosmic divinities within body, speech, and mind are but aspects of the soul (*ātman*) and the inner organ (*antaḥkarana*) of human consciousness.

Developing a relationship of identification with the divine involves two stages of practice. In the first stage, the Tantric affirms a distinction between the spiritual and the material forms of reality by ritually summoning the divine essences in mantra form to manifest themselves in body, speech, and mind. The basic Tantric pattern imitates the classical Sāṅkhya-Yoga division of reality into spirit (*puruṣa*) and matter (*prakṛti*). However, after assuming Sāṅkhyan dualism for practical purposes, the Tantric attempts to reunite dichotomous spirit and matter. The Tantric adept then "lays down" (*nyāsa*) the macrocosmic deities by calling upon the microcosmic forms that reside within the human personality. This elaborate process of interidentification or *nyāsa* is perhaps the most important feature of Tantric ritual practice. It provides the essential set of relations between the adept as a microcosmic divine self (*ātman*) and the macrocosmic reality of Śakti and Śiva as the Absolute Brahman. Further, it identifies and distinguishes the material and spiritual elements as products of a reality created by physical, verbal, and mental components. In sectarian Śākta traditions, ritual *nyāsa* is a process by which the pantheon of subdeities is systematically identified with aspects of the Supreme Śakti and with the individual's various physical, verbal, and mental components. In the second stage, *nyāsa* is designed to dissolve the distinctions that separate the Tantric adept from the source of his or her ultimate being (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ānanda*). In contrast to the classical Sāṅkhya-Yoga model in which the yogi perfectly isolates the spirit (*puruṣa*) from matter (*prakṛti*), the Tantric yogi achieves a reunification of the material and efficient elements that constitute reality. In effect, the Tantric re-cognizes (*pratyabhijñā*) the ultimate nondistinction of creation and creator.

Nyāsa as a ritual process of identifying deities as physical, verbal, and mental aspects of the adept's spiritual personality has both worldly and soteriological implications. As the adept gradually dissolves the notion of a distinction between the divine source and its physical, mental, or verbal manifestation, he or she gains a complete mastery over that faculty or form.

The *mudrās* or symbolic gestures employed in Tantric ritual may be included in the broader definition of *nyāsa*. By showing the *mudrā*, the Tantric creates a physical manifestation and visual display of divine form; not only do *mudrās* give "shape" to the divine in a ritual context, they also provide a conceptual link to the qualities or attributes of divinity that are made part of the Tantric's personality. As the Tantric adept shows the *mudrā* in the course of contemplative worship (*upāsana*), he or she acquires the power associated with that particular aspect of divinity. The adept is said to achieve the level of realization with which the *mudrā* is associated.[26] The *mudrā* literally "seals" the relationship between the adept and the deity invoked in the form of the *mudrā*.

Similarly, the verbal forms of mantras, identified as sound aspects of Śakti, affirm and then dissolve the distinctions that appear to exist between material and spiritual realities. Mantric speech, in particular, bridges the gap between the forms of ordinary speech and their divine source. Mantras of various types, in conjunction with *mudrās*, are then ritually "laid on" the body as the Tantric subverts the false mental impression that names and forms (*nāmarūpa*) exist apart from ultimate reality and that Self (*ātman*) exists apart from its divine origin (*brahman*).

The *nyāsa* process, by which distinctions and differences between the divine and mundane are established for the sake of dissolving them, has intellectual parallels in the works of non-Tantric Hindu nondualist (*advaitin*) philosophers. In this sense, Tantrics are not different from non-Tantrics in kind but rather in emphasis, method, and technique. Among Hindu Tantrics, Śāktas in particular are responsible for elevating the discussion of the various aspects of *nyāsa* in ritual (*pūjā*) to the center of textual consideration. Śrīvidyā, in particular, with its well-developed mantra and yantra traditions develops *nyāsa* to the level of a ritual art.

4. *Tantrism involves elaborate speculations on the nature of sound and specifies the ritual use of mantras to bring about soteriological and worldly aims.*

Creation in its material manifestations is paralleled in sounds that are metalinguistic formations reflecting the original state of ontological unity.[27] The Absolute Brahman in its most subtle, prearticulated form is "sound" (*vāc*). Brahman-as-sound (*śabdabrahman*), according to Tantric theory, has gradually devolved from a state of transcendent unity into subtle and increasingly more mundane forms of sound and language. Mantras are the means by which the adept taps into this primordial resonance that pervades creation.

Tantrics develop elaborate speculations and practical ritual formulations in order to reestablish the relationship between Brahman-as-sound (*śabdabrahman*) and speech as we know it. *Śabdabrahman* is heard in condensed verbal formulas or mantras, which in varying degrees manifest divinity's particular aspects. Just as everything exists physically more and less subtly as a name and form of the divine, so reality is conceived as having subtle and mundane verbal parallels which originate in divinity.

The Śākta Tantras, apparently following the lead of Kashmiri Śaiva sources, understand sound (*vāc*) to manifest itself in four stages. Beginning with its transcendent (*parā*) form as prearticulated *śabda*, Brahman-as-sound devolves in three successive stages from metalanguage into ordinary speech. Just as Śakti emerges from an original unity with Śiva as the physical and spiritual universe, so her parallel forms as *śabdabrahman* gradually emerge as ever more manifest aspects of reality in verbal forms.

From the standpoint of its divine origin, the process of creation is not evolution but devolution, that is, a gradual and deliberate degeneration of originally pure sound. From the standpoint of the manifest world, however, the process is a gradual evolution from divine unity into increasingly more material names and forms. The Tantric believes that by tapping into the higher forms of sound, that is, by using mantras, he or she can retrace the process whereby the One becomes Many in the form of sound and so acquire its divine characteristics.

Brahman's sound aspects achieve their most sublime recognizable, "vulgar" form as the forty-eight (or fifty-one) phonemes of the Sanskrit language, i.e., as the so-called "little mothers" (*mātṛkā*s). Mantras, such as the *śrīvidyā,* often occur as collections of meaningless seed (*bīja*) sounds in a meta-Sanskrit that transcends ordinary speech. As their name suggests, they are the "seeds" of all sounds. *Bīja* mantras thus have no lexical meanings but rather occur as single phonemes or collections of sounds. For example, the *śrīvidyā* mantra includes both simple phonemes such as "ka" and "la," and the more complex *bīja* "hrīm." *Bīja*s can become extremely complex as well as difficult to pronounce. For example, a common *bīja* found in the mantric worship of the guru is "hskhphrem."[28] In other cases, the *bīja*s combine with other mantric statements that retain syntactical meanings in Sanskrit and take the form of salutations or intercessions to a particular divinity. For example, the root-mantra (*mūlamantra*) of the elephant-headed Gaṇeśa or Gaṇapati, which reads in Sanskrit *auṃ aiṃ hrīṃ śrīṃ glīṃ glauṃ gaṃ ganapataye varavarada sarva janan me vasamanaya svāhā,* is partially "translatable." It might be rendered: *auṃ aiṃ hrīṃ śrīṃ glīṃ glauṃ gaṃ O Ganapati, O Best of Protectors, allow me to control all people, svāhā.* Each *bīja* within a given mantra will have its own set of associations and interpretations. Tantrics maintain that a specific set of common *bījas* in different mantras means some form of relationship among the deities with which they are identified. In every case, the mantra is a "middle level" (*madhyamā*) stage of *śabdabrahman,* one that links ordinary speech (*vaikharī*) to the higher levels of speech (*vāc*).

Mantras are then ranked within sectarian traditions. Some are deemed more concentrated and subtle manifestations of *śabdabrahman* than others and the root-mantra (*mūlamantra*) the most sublime form of all. In Śrīvidyā, for example, the root-mantra of the goddess known as the *śrīvidyā* is the highest form of speech (*vāc*) and the most subtle articulation of *śabdabrahman*. As such, it is considered the source of all other mantras, and indeed all other types of sound, which are its lesser devolutions. Further, the *śrīvidyā* is composed entirely of *bīja* syllables and is therefore considered superior since it no longer partakes in the mundane aspects of language as a means of ordinary communication.

To hold the keys to the ritual use of the mantras is to be empowered with the ability to control one's environment, manipulate nature, affect social and spiritual events, and, ultimately, guide the course of individual salvation (both one's own *and* that of others). Mantras are the substance and the technological software of Tantric *sādhana*: Śākta Tantrics call them *vidyā*, literally meaning both knowledge and science.

5. *In addition to the use of mantras and physical, anthropomorphic forms of divinity in ritual worship, Tantrics also include in their worship other symbolic elements, especially diagrammatical representations known as yantras, maṇḍalas, or cakras.*

While the three terms—*yantra, maṇḍala,* and *cakra*—are used interchangeably in Tantric literature, Hindu sources favor *cakra* and *yantra*. The word *cakra* ordinarily means "wheel," such as a cart wheel or potter's wheel, but also signifies a kingdom in the sense of a place in which a king's chariot moves unencumbered.[29] *Cakra* is also used in the sense of an arrangement, such as a battle formation (*cakravyūha*) or the circuitous pattern of poetic expression (*cakrabandha*). In general, a *cakra* suggests any ordered arrangement of elements designed to accomplish specific ends; it is both multiple as a combination of elements and unified as a functional entity.

Tantrics employ the term *cakra* in a number of technical ways, including as a designation of the diagram and configurations used in worship, such as Śrīvidyā's *śrīcakra,* and to indicate the psychophysical yogic centers in the human body. In each case the prevailing image is that of a pattern of potent forces or elements joining together to form a systematic whole that may be appropriated for any number of specific or general functions. Thus, the Tantric adepts of a single lineage (*paramparā*) or tradition (*sampradāya*) may likewise be called a *cakra* (or, as it is common in contemporary South India, a *maṇḍali* or circle). Just as the *śrīcakra* as a collection of specially constructed elements joined together becomes a whole greater than its parts, so a *cakra* of adepts is thought to accomplish as a group more for each person than the individual by his or her own independent efforts could achieve.

The term *yantra* may be similarly understood. Literally a device or machine, a *yantra* is an entity or mental configuration whose form follows function. Stella Kramrisch has provided a useful general definition:

> A Yantra is a geometrical contrivance by which any aspect of the Supreme Principle may be bound (yantr, to bind; from the

> root 'yam') to any spot for the purpose of worship. It is an artifice in which the ground (*bhūmi*) is converted into the extent of the manifested universe.[30]

While Kramrisch has in mind the *yantra*s used for temple construction—the symbolic metaphysical blueprints that form their architectural basis—her definition is equally applicable in Śākta Tantric contexts. The *śrīyantra* or *śrīcakra* of the Śrīvidyā school, for example, is a *yantra* in this classical sense: it is a model that parallels the material, verbal, and cognitive realities it represents. According to Śrīvidyā adepts, the *śrīcakra* is not only a blueprint of the primordial creative act in which the One becomes Many, it is the very form (*svarūpa*) the universe assumes at macrocosmic and microcosmic levels. Put differently, the *śrīcakra* is at once the subtle shape or configuration of the universe and the subtle essence of human body, speech, and mind. More than simply a description of these realities, the *yantra* functions as a road map which, with proper instructions, shows the adept the way back to the ultimate's origins. But unlike a map, which only symbolizes a corresponding reality, the *yantra* is an index of reality: it is not merely a depiction of reality but its actual, subtle content. Just as the *śrīvidyā* mantra is, for the Śrīvidyā adept, the highest phonic emanation of Brahman, so the *śrīyantra* or *śrīcakra* is the parallel form the mantra assumes as creation gradually unfolds.

The *yantra*'s purpose is not to depict all the various constituents of visible, material world. Rather, it is to represent the world emerging in its most essential aspects (*kalā*) as it particularizes the amorphous, primordial Brahman. A *yantra* also has a theological identity. The *śrīyantra,* for example, is the joining of Śiva and Śakti out of whose union the material universe emerges as a secondary effusion. Traditional Tantric commentators offer a variety of interpretations of *yantra* symbolism, always linking its significance to its practical use as a ritual object. Within the Śrīvidyā school, for example, Vidyānanda, author of the authoritative *Artharatnāvali* on the *Nityāṣoḍaśikārṇava,* remarks that the *śrīcakra* is the clear medium in which the goddess is reflected. Thus, he says, it is the form (*rūpa*) of Śakti as well as a reflection (*vimarśa*) of her original illumination (*prakāśa*) when she was coupled with Śiva.[31] The one who meditates on the *śrīcakra,* Vidyānanda concludes, is capable of achieving any desire since the *cakra* is the reflection of all underlying material and spiritual forces.

In sum, the *yantra* is the Tantric's instrument, employed to coordinate the relationship between one's material and psychological being and its divine source. At the same time, it is the very shape and order the divine forces assume as reality unfolds in our consciousness as names and forms.

Yantra forms of the gods and goddesses are the centerpieces of Tantric symbolism. While hardly an innovation of Tantric traditions, *yantras* as ritual objects and as abstract microcosmic/macrocosmic symbols join together with the physical, anthropomorphic images and the mantra formulations to create a triadic conception of divinity. It is through the ritual use and interpretation of these three types of theological forms that Tantric theology and practice develops. There is often a set of three specific images, as is the case in the Śrīvidyā school with its focus on the anthropomorphic goddess Lalitā Tripurasundarī, the *śrīvidyā* mantra, and the *śrīcakra*. In some cases the triadic imagery is incomplete or shared with other schools or traditions. The *śrīcakra,* for example, develops in specific ritual formulations within the Śrīvidyā school, but is also used as a *yantra* image for goddesses other than Lalitā Tripurasundarī. Thus the *śrīcakra* sometimes appears in ritual contexts that have little to do with Śrīvidyā, just as mantras used in Śrīvidyā rituals may likewise be used in other settings. While *yantras* and triadic conceptions of godhead are characteristic of Tantric thought and practice, their use and interpretation is not consistent nor is it necessarily formulated rigorously, except in rare instances, such as within Śrīvidyā.

6. *Tantrics, like other Hindus, place an extraordinary emphasis on the authority of the teacher (guru).*

In Tantrism, the guru's authority may supersede that of any scriptural or traditional source. While scripture (*āgama*), reason (*yukti*), and one's own experience (*anubhava*) are theoretically equivalent, the guru is the ultimate arbiter of tradition, of canon, and of practice: whatever the guru transmits as orthodox the disciple accepts as such. The relationship of the guru to the disciple is solidified by the necessity of initiation (*dīkṣā*). Without initiation the individual is considered neither qualified nor empowered to practice or interpret any aspect of Tantric *sādhana*. One may, for example, learn certain Tantric mantras or study Tantric doctrines or practices but not be considered able to use them or comprehend their import fully.

The notion of initiation is also crucial to our understanding of Tantric "secrecy" (*rahasya*). Tantric texts, teachings, and practices are called "secret" not simply because they are restricted and limited both in transmission and in accessibility to outsiders, which before the twentieth century is most certainly true. Rather, they are secret because without initiation one is not fully empowered to use or comprehend them. Certain elements of Tantric teaching, however, such as the *śrīvidyā* mantra, are considered efficacious in their own right because of their inherent power as embodiments of divinity. While the mantra's power is in some sense part of its nature, its potential is realized only in the context of a proper initiation.[32] While mantras have an inherent power, Tantrics stress that it is the guru who empowers these resources and the guru who provides the instructions necessary for the adept to accomplish his or her aims. Tantrics understand the guru as the vital link to the ultimately inherent power that pervades the universe and resides within the individual. No aspect of Tantric *sādhana* can be properly learned from a book alone, and Tantrics stress the necessity of "protecting" the unqualified.

Tantric secrecy is part of a theological understanding that establishes a necessary and complementary relationship between the Absolute's two primary forms. Secrecy is necessary because Śakti in her fluid, dynamic, and changing character is volatile and dangerous. Without proper care, an inherently powerful manifestation of Śakti, such as a mantra, can be abused or cause irreparable damage. The underlying idea is not Tantric per se. Throughout Hindu tradition we observe that the feminine Śakti must be controlled by the masculine Śiva in order to be beneficent and prevent dangerous events. Women, Manu the Law-giver says, should never be independent. But since Śakti's fluid and dynamic power as well as her changing forms are linked inextricably to Śiva's "hard," "static," and eternal nature, she can be controlled. In Tantrism, the guru as the living Śiva keeps the disciple free from danger and on the path to the fruitful realization of Śakti's potential.

We notice that in practice Tantric secrecy is not merely a matter of concealment. Rather, it is a complex religious category that binds tradition (*sampradāya*) and lineage (*paramparā*) together into a socioreligious community. Secret transmission of tradition is the way in which Tantrics create a communal or "family" (*kula*) relationship which sets them apart from other Hindus. The guru's direct guidance not only defines the path and practices of the particular lineage (*paramparā*), it effectively delimits the scope and accessibility of specific teachings and interpretations, such as the proper use of mantras, *mudrās*, and *cakras*. Tantric secrecy, then, is a pact between generations and a method by which "powerful" religious teachings are controlled and dispersed.

Tantric knowledge and practice are fundamentally esoteric inasmuch as they involve a special type of instruction. The qualifications necessary for Tantric *sādhana* are selectively determined by the guru's own interpretations of tradition, text, and doctrine. The guru is the living embodiment of what the Tantric adept deems to be ultimate and the best in humankind. While the guru/disciple relationship is understood as essential in virtually all branches of Hindu learning, in Tantrism formal initiation is the sine qua non for both study and practice.

At stake for Tantrics is not only the locus of authority but of power in social, religious, and political settings. By controlling access to text and traditional learning, the guru as the empowering agent in the Tantric community is also the arbiter of history. The guru's power, in turn, is checked and balanced by his reciprocal relationship with texts, traditions, and disciples. His commitment to create a living continuity with a more righteous past is coupled to a view of change as both vital and, ultimately, unreal. The guru's power then is another instance of the creative tension and ambiguity between the dynamic forces of creation (Śakti) and the eternal, unchanging source (Śiva) from which creation emanates. Without the guru, whether he is a historical or a legendary figure, there is no Tantrism. At the same time, without the supporting notion of an inherently conservative, divinely created tradition, there are no Tantric gurus. In effect, the gurus control and disperse power and so function in the Tantric's socioreligious setting just as Śakti and Śiva do in the theological setting. Within his lineage the guru is at once a divine embodiment and a link in a chain ostensively traced to a primordial power.

Underlying the Tantric's preoccupation with the authority of the guru is the belief that the natural and social worlds are manifestations of power. Reality is power in the sense of a divine energy that animates and ultimately defines the form of any given thing. Tantrics maintain that this power, visibly embodied in the various forms of Śakti, can be controlled and directed to one's own aims. The alternative to control and mastery over one's environment is ignorance. The lot of ordinary people, which the Tantric texts refer to literally as "beasts" (*paśu*), is to be merely victims of the karmic forces that govern the material world. For the Tantric adept the stakes are even more grave: without a qualified guru one fails to establish a proper relationship with Śakti. The result is chaos or the misappropriation of power—both conditions which the texts tell us regularly befall the careless or corrupt Tantric adept.

7. *Tantric spirituality employs ritual and meditative practices that entail a variety of forms of bipolar symbology, including the theological images of a conjugal union of god and goddess. However, Tantrism does not differ significantly from Purāṇic Hinduism in the ways it conceives the world and God.*

Tantric theology usually focuses on either the masculine or feminine forms of divinity, but in all denominations it centers on their relationship. The gods take on the particular characteristics of sectarian traditions. Śāktas, for example, primarily center on the goddess and her relationship with Śiva, while Śaivas take the opposite approach. The distinctive Tantric theological notion is that the One has become Many by manifesting itself in a series of binary names and forms that unfold as complementary opposites: masculine/feminine, passive/active, ascetic/erotic, and illumination (*prakāśa*)/reflection (*vimarśa*). To this list we can simply add any pair of complementary opposites. For Śāktas, Śakti is pure bliss (*ānanda*) and beginningless (*anādi*) in nature; creation is an ongoing and periodic cycle of events, which ultimately derive from an eternal source, Śiva. In both form and substance, reality is at once Śiva and Śakti.

The symbolic attributes set forth in these binary relations are treated either as exclusively applicable to one gender or the other, or as reciprocal and fluid. Thus, Śakti is either the active element in creation complimented by the passive, eternal Śiva, as is usually the case, or she can be seen as both passive and active. As the Śākta's primary deity, Śakti encompasses all divine qualities, names, and forms. In some extraordinary cases, both masculine and feminine principles are represented equally, as in the half-man, half-woman figure of Ardhanarīśvara.[33]

Śākta- and Śaiva-oriented Tantrics assume the pantheon of classical Hindu deities—and create specific names and forms of their own based on the classical model. In Śrīvidyā, the majority of historical writers are *smārta* brahmans, that is, they identify with traditions that follow the exoteric ritual traditions of the so-called *smṛti*s (i.e., *gṛhya-*, *śrauta-*, and *dharmasūtras*) and worship the *pañcāyatana devata*s, that is, the five divinities (Sūrya the Sun god, Śiva, Viṣṇu, Gaṇeśa, and Durgā or Devī). All deities, however, are treated in sectarian terms as manifestations or aspects of the Supreme Deity, whoever that may be. Thus Śākta Tantrics may worship other deities or forms of a deity as subordinate or complementary aspects of their chosen goddess.

Tantrics base their claims for both metaphysical unity and diversity in creation by appealing to a theistic notion that literally conceives of the universe as a product of Śiva and Śakti's conjugal union.[34] Creation, as it were, is the offspring of the divine union, an expression of their divine play (*līlā*) that is both identical to and different (*bhedābheda*) from Śiva and Śakti. Creation is also *māyā* or "deception" inasmuch as the transformation of the One into two, and the two into forms of threes, and finally into the

Many is a product of dualistic imagination. We should emphasize, however, that the effect of divine *māyā,* the universe, is no less real simply because it appears to human beings as bound to the limitations of subject/object dualism. Creation resulting from the divine power of *māyā* does not mean the universe is illusory but rather that it comes into being as a deliberate act on the part of a playful and loving God who assumes a binary form to effect the divine will.

The binary opposites, represented principally by Śiva and Śakti, combine and so create a triadic universe which takes on the various forms of ontological being and epistemological experience that make up reality as we understand it. Śākta Tantrics conceive the universe as existing at three levels of being: everything exists in gross (*sthūla*), subtle (*sūkṣma*), or transcendent (*parā*) forms. These three levels of being take shape materially through the three *guṇas—sattva* or goodness, *rajas* or activity, and *tamas* or darkness. The three *guṇas* characterize the names and forms that take shape in the material universe (*prakṛti*). As forms of Śakti and Śiva, everything can be understood to exist in varying degrees as proportions of being (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ānanda*).

Viewed epistemologically, the Absolute's inherently bipolar nature (Śiva/Śakti, Illumination/Reflection, Fire/Water, Sun/Moon) initiates the relationship of subject and object. In terms of our cognitive processes, the Absolute manifests itself as subject, object, and the process of knowing (*jñātṛ, jñeya, jñāna*), as well as the three states of human consciousness (waking, dreaming, and deep sleep). When the adept attains final liberation, these triadic manifestations ultimately become subsumed into the One from which they originated. Thus the pattern of One (Brahman) into two (Śiva and Śakti) and two into three (the forms of the universe) is completed when the three are subsumed into a fourth (the reuniting of adept and Absolute). In this way Tantrics merely expand upon the symbolic patterns that pervade Hindu tradition. For example, the three states of consciousness discussed in Māṇḍûkya Upaniṣad culminate in the fourth (*turya*), just as the three levels of *śabdabrahman* dissolve in the fourth stage of transcendent (*parā*) "sound."

While Tantrics employ other sets of numerical configurations to create symbolic patterns, Tantric theology's most consistent feature is the idea of a single divine origin which consists of bipolar elements that combine to form a triadic creation.[35]

8. *Tantra is not only secret (rahasya) in the sense that gurus restrict its most spiritually efficacious teachings to those they deem qualified, it is expeditious*

and dangerous—a "lightning-bolt vehicle" (vajrayana), as Buddhists call it, not easily controlled or mastered.

Tantric practice (*sādhana*) is distinguished by claiming to offer a shortcut to worldly empowerment and final liberation (*mokṣa*). Many Tantric schools, such as Śrīvidyā, claim that once initiation into its secrets has been obtained, the aspirant is guaranteed worldly prosperity, power over the environment, and liberation in the present birth. Tantrics usually consider their present birth their last, the karmic culmination of literally millions of previous births. Accompanying the prospect for success is also the potential for failure or miscalculation: as quickly as one can ascend towards the pinnacle of human aspirations, one can as precipitously fall. But, for the Tantric, the dangers of *sādhana* are worth the risks: final liberation (*mukti*) will be achieved in this world at the same time that one maximizes the enjoyment (*bhukti*) of one's present birth. Tantric lineages usually add to their primary ritual *sādhana* ancillary ritual practices that promise swift accomplishment and skillfully managed mundane and "spiritual" goals.

9. *Tantrics use conventionally prohibited substances in ritual, such as liquor and meat, and engage in antinomian practices for spiritual and material ends, including sexual intercourse outside the legitimate, Dharmic boundaries of marriage.*

Tantrics, as we have observed, often deliberately violate the conventional canons of brāhmaṇical Hindu Dharma. The use of unconventional ritual methods centers on the introduction of the five m's or *pañca-makāra,* so-called because each of the Sanskrit terms begin with 'm': wine (*madya*), fish (*matsya*), meat (*māṃsa*), fermented grain (*mudrā*) and sexual union (*maithuna*).

In high-caste Hindu traditions, vegetarianism, like solemn marriage, is often a matter affecting social and religious status, and hence becomes a mark of spiritual credibility. The Tantric's use of the *pañcamakāra* is particularly controversial within these social circles. Also included in the extraordinary (and controversial) category of Tantric practice are various types of erotic meditation, including *kāmakalādhyāna,* or meditation on the "aspect of desire" (usually identified with the female organ). The symbolic value and social propriety of the *pañcamakāra* and such practices as *kāmakalādhyāna* are topics of much discussion within the Śrīvidyā school. Whether or not they are condoned, these and other socially antinomian or questionable types of conduct are given careful attention in Tantric sources. While characteristically Tantric, these substances and activities are by no means universally accepted or approved by all Tantrics.

The radical elements in Tantric tradition, however, do in a sense encapsulate the Tantric's final spiritual aims. By collapsing the distinction between conventional and ultimate reality, these antinomian elements of Tantric *sādhana* present an expedient method for achieving one's goals. Extraordinary rituals that defy the codes of high-caste Hindus are part of the Tantric's attempt to break through the structures of convention and discover ultimate reality as immanent in the physical, everyday world.

However, intoxicating substances, sensuality, and even ritual sex do more than force the Tantric to break down the distinctions between the ultimate reality of Brahman and the mundane physical and material world. These distinctive Kaula tradition elements intend to propel the adept to the realization of Brahman's blissful nature (*ānanda*) in both physical and spiritual realms.[36] In his *Kaula Upaniṣadbhāṣya,* for example, Bhāskararāya writes, "Antinomianism (*adharma*) is the Supreme Brahman because it dispenses with qualities [of differentiation]. . . . there is nothing other than Śakti. The sense [of all this] is that [the very notion of] difference itself is an error."[37]

The correct ritual use of the *pañcamakāra* both dissolves the delimiting factors that prevent the adept from seeing through duality's veil and approximates the experience of divine bliss (*ānanda*) which the Tantric gradually makes permanent through repeated practice. These experiences are then gradually made permanent by undermining conventional notions of propriety and moral action that obstruct the adept's insight by reifying ultimately false distinctions.

Critically considered, the antinomian elements of Hindu Tantrism distinguish it objectively from non-Tantric Hinduism. Making that which is ordinarily profane or taboo into the sacred reverses normative and descriptive patterns of Hindu behavior. The Tantric's intention, however, is not to make these radical elements normative for all Hindus but to set Tantric *sādhana* apart. The effect is to affirm the extraordinary and superior character of Tantric teaching in both theological and socioreligious terms. One need only be suspected of being a Tantric to be considered dangerous, powerful, and "radical."

The Kaula Tantric's use of liquor, nonvegetarian food, and eroticism to transcend ordinary norms should not, however, be construed as a proposal for restructuring Hindu society at large. Tantrism in general, and especially Śākta Tantrism in the Sanskritic traditions, does not intend to be revolutionary in the sense of establishing a new structure of social egalitarianism or by creating a new set of normative social values. Rather, it opens its doors to only a few who by their extraordinary commitment to a particular life-style seek to distinguish and empower themselves.

Further, the Tantric does not perform these antinomian acts in order to create a new concept of power but rather seizes upon a common Hindu belief. Governed by the instructions of a guru and placed in strictly prescribed ritual settings, the Kaula Tantric imitates Śiva's yogic nature and follows his precedent. By combining erotic and ascetic techniques, the Tantric becomes Śiva-like and therefore a master who obtains and controls the power which is common to both erotic and ascetical acts: *tapas*. As O'Flaherty has shown, Śiva's *tapas,* literally "heat," is power that is characterized by ascetic or erotic manifestations—yet in both instances he produces power which sustains and fosters the world as a pattern of complementary opposites.[38] Śiva controls himself, his environment, his destiny, and all else by virtue of his mastery of yoga and his appropriation of the world as *tapas.* In a similar way, the Śākta Tantric taps into the most volatile source of *tapas,* namely, Śakti herself, whose creative effusion is brought under control when she is joined with Śiva. The Tantric sees the universe itself as a manifestation of Śakti's creative energy which, as Woodroffe so astutely noted, is nothing but power waiting to be harnessed. Placed in the hands of socially conservative brahmans, who teach erotic restraint and control, Tantric *sādhana* becomes yet another method for creating, maintaining, and transferring power, both in social and religious contexts.

10. *Perhaps Tantrism's most distinctive feature, though not as often cited as the controversial use of intoxicants, sex, and other sensual aids, is initiation (dīkṣā) in which the established criteria of caste and gender are not the primary tests of qualification (adhikāra) for sādhana.*[39]

Caste and gender are not unimportant criteria for determining Tantric qualification (*adhikāra*) for different types of practice (*sādhana*). Tantrics, however, depend more upon physical and mental dispositions, such as personal self-discipline and a commitment to undertake the rigors of the spiritual disciplines of daily practice.[40] Tantric criteria for qualification have to do with an individual's moral, intellectual, and personal qualities. Most Tantric sources are neither anticaste nor especially egalitarian regarding gender. Rather, they emphasize non-caste-based or non-gender-specific criteria for determining basic qualification.[41] In short, Tantrics do not regard caste and gender to be the final determinants for an individual's entitlement to Tantric initiation. Like initiation (*dīkṣā*), the characteristic of non-caste, non-gender determinacy with regard to qualification for instruction is a necessary but not sufficient criterion for classifying a Tantric phenomenon. It is present in *every* case. The most distinctive "Tantric" caste and gender value is that non-twice-born persons (*śūdra* or *atraivarṇika*) of both genders may theoretically receive Tantric initiation. In practice many conservative Tantric traditions do not admit women, especially women still in childbearing years, as full initiates, due to brāhmaṇical taboos regarding periodic ritual impurity.

These ten descriptive characteristics are not, of course, the only features of Hindu Tantric traditions.[42] They do, however, cut across sectarian lines and outline the general criteria applied in the present study. As part of a method devised to distinguish Tantric from non-Tantric Hindu traditions, we can now combine them with our preliminary definition of *sādhana* and begin to apply the principles of polythetic classification.

Simply put, any text, practice, person, or group that bears a significant number of these descriptive traits should be called Tantric. While certainly some are more important than others and several are indispensable, no one feature taken alone will suffice to distinguish Tantrism from other forms of Hinduism. While all Tantrics must be initiated by a guru, initiation is Tantric only in the presence of the other distinguishing characteristics of Tantrism. The use of antinomian elements in Tantric rituals—usually the feature discussed as distinctively Tantric—is not definitive but merely evident in most sectarian Tantric formulations.

While the method at one level is deliberately ambiguous, inasmuch as it permits latitude in the number of features that are sufficient to define a "Tantric" phenomenon, it offers us a preliminary means for distinguishing the Tantric from the non-Tantric Hindu.

Śākta Tantrism as Hindu Tantrism Par Excellence

It is with these defining characteristics in mind that Śākta forms of Tantrism are deemed to be Hindu Tantrism par excellence.[43] Unlike in Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava Tantrism, the majority of sources that bear "Tantra" as part of their title are Śākta. Specific Śākta Tantras may focus on the goddess in any one of her sundry names and forms, though often they refer to her only generically as Śakti or Devī. Classifying the goddess's anthropomorphic aspects as beneficent (*saumya* or *aghora*), horrific (*ghora*), or especially horrific (*ghora(ghora)tara*) usually depends on her physical, theological, and mythological associations.[44] Names and forms are mere aspects of the Supreme Principle of the Universe in its active, creative, and theologically responsive feminine manifestation. As Bhāskararāya observes, "Whatever form of a particular goddess appears, even if it is differently known, is in reality only her [the Supreme Śakti]."[45]

Within textual and practical traditions usually one divine aspect is considered *the* most important manifestation while others are ancillary. In Śrīvidyā, for example, the primary form of the goddess is the beneficent (*saumya*) and motherly Lalitā (literally, "Lovely"), also known as Tripurā ("The Three Cities") or, by her full name, Lalitā Tripurasundarī. For the Śrīvidyā adept, other gods or goddesses are considered aspects of Lalitā Tripurasundarī in greater or lesser manifestations. Terrible forms of Śakti, such as Kālī, Durgā, or Vārāhī, are mentioned within Śrīvidyā sources, and even given important ancillary ritual roles (cf. *PKS,* VII.). But the horrific and especially horrific goddesses are generally of secondary importance in Śrīvidyā. Bhāskararāya, for example, wrote a commentary on *Durgāsaptaśatī,* though he is clearly not committed to a *sādhana* that centers on the horrific Durgā. This sometimes confusing array of possibilities can raise questions about Śakti's various aspects. Tantric writers freely interchange the goddess's names and forms, often identifying beneficent aspects with horrific aspects and *vice versa.*

A wide selection of names and forms for different types of goddesses and the application of a variety of epithets for a single aspect suggest Śakti's all-encompassing nature. While this may be interpreted to be part of Śāktism's inclusion and tolerance of different theological formulations, it is undoubtedly also a method by which the pantheon of Hindu deities is subordinated to Śakti and subsumed under a particular form of the goddess in a rather loosely constructed divine hierarchy.

In catholic Śākta Tantrism, regardless of which form or name of the goddess is considered ultimate, the focus is clear: God is Śakti. United with her consort, she is the ultimate creative force. While Śakti's theological relationship with the masculine element should not be understated, neither should it divert attention from the Śākta's focus on the feminine.

In short, Śākta theology assumes a dual focus. On the one hand, there is the all-inclusive Śakti who in one form or another stands apart from and superior to all other aspects of divinity. From this perspective all other gods, demigods, or forms of creation are mere aspects and emanations of the goddess. On the other hand, Śakti is inextricably bound to her complement, Śiva, with whom she exists in a binary relationship. Here she is at once all-powerful and independent in her role as mother, and controlled and subordinate in her roles as dutiful daughter and wife. In this respect, the Śākta Tantric view also follows closely the socioreligious patterns of classical Hinduism: women as representations of Śakti are powerful but potentially dangerous unless they are controlled by males.

We must, however, exercise caution when we discuss Hindu sectarianism, especially with regard to goddess traditions. Śāktism in both Tantric or non-Tantric formulations is so closely related to Śaiva traditions that it is not unusual to find Śāktas referring to themselves as Śaivas. This is the situation, for example, among contemporary Śrīvidyā adepts in Tamil Nadu, the majority of whom are Śaiva-oriented *smārta* brahmans. Theologically and ritually the differences between Śaivas and Śāktas are more frequently matters of emphasis rather than of kind.[46] Drawing strict denominational lines within Śākta Tantrism may impose artificial distinctions that separate intersecting traditions. While Śākta Tantrics may appear to be religious chameleons, changing color to suit their particular contexts, this should not be construed as a lack of theological centeredness. Rather, it suggests that a rigorous sectarianism that limits one's theological options is considered neither necessary nor expedient.

In sectarian Tantric formulations some deities or demigods common to other Hindu traditions acquire specific attributes and functions within a given theological system. In Śrīvidyā, for example, specialized sets of deities, such as the fifteen or sixteen *nityā*s associated with the houses of the zodiac and the *yoginī*s of the *śrīcakra,* are given specific roles that do not extend beyond Śrīvidyā. These sets of names and forms, however, often do appear outside Śrīvidyā's boundaries. It is common in Tantric sects for specific functions to be assigned to deities or demigods who might have very different roles in other Tantric and non-Tantric traditions. At the same time, many deities of the Hindu pantheon function for Tantrics just as they do for non-Tantrics. For example, Śakti's eldest son, Gaṇeśa, retains his popular role as the lord of beginnings who should be worshiped at the outset of every ritual.[47] In addition, Gaṇeśa has other, more specific functions in his various Tantric roles. He is, for example, located within the *mūlādhāra cakra* of the human body and is an important figure worshiped in the initial stages of *kuṇḍalinī* yoga.

While Śākta Tantrism is a pan-Indian phenomenon, specific theological formulations may be regional in origin (e.g., the worship of Kālī/Durgā may come from Bengal and Assam) and Tantric texts specify regional variations as part of the catholic tradition.[48] By the eleventh or twelfth century Tantric sources are widely diffused in Sanskrit. Theological views and ritual prescriptions as well as names and forms of divinities cross geographical boundaries. Thus, regional divisions that specify the ritual worship of particular forms of Śakti, proposed in such texts as the *Śaktisaṃgama Tantra,* appear largely artificial.[49] In fact, the generic features of Tantric *sādhana* clearly cross denominational as well as temporal and geographic boundaries. For example, while Śrīvidyā is Śākta- rather than Śaiva-oriented, its speculative traditions draw heavily from the Kaula, Trika, and Krama schools of Kashmiri Śaivism as well as from South Indian Śaiva Siddhānta.[50] Without ever stating explicitly a common intellectual bond with Śaivism, Śrīvidyā adopts wholesale the essentials of Kashmiri Śaiva thought, including sophisticated speculations regarding the nature of sound and the corresponding technical vocabulary of mantra theory and practice. While Kashmiri Śaiva sources elaborate on mantric theory in ways Śākta Tantras generally do not, it is clear that Śaivas and Śāktas share common sources and apply these theories to suit their own distinctive theological ends.[51] In contrast, the Tantric worship of Durgā or Kālī which is now pan-Indian has been concentrated and developed in Bengal and Assam.

If Śāktas are exemplary Tantrics, then Śrîvidyā is Śākta Tantrism par excellence. No other sectarian tradition goes to such lengths to organize and elaborate its theology, symbolism, and ritual practices in such clearly defined ways. This is evident not only in literary sources but in the continuity of practice and interpretation maintained by contemporary adepts.

As a living tradition, the Śrīvidyā school is found in nearly every corner of India.[52] Subdivided into two main branches, the Kaula (or Kulācāra), which maintains the more radical elements of Tantric theory and practice, and the Samayācāra, which disdains these influences, Śrīvidyā has a voluminous canon in Sanskrit, emerging in written forms probably around the ninth century. As Goudriaan observes, Śrīvidyā writers are not only prolific but intellectually adept—no other Tantric school offers us as thorough a review of Śākta theology and practice. If Śrīvidyā is in this respect more of an exception than the rule, it puts the scholar in a position to consider systematically Tantrism's basic triadic divinity. In Śrīvidyā, the triadic goddess as gross (*sthūla*) or anthropomorphic, subtle (*sūkṣma*) or mantric, and transcendent (*parā*) or yantric is interpreted in three distinctive and characteristic forms: Lalitātripurasundarī, *śrīvidyā,* and *śrīcakra.*

We will not consider Śrīvidyā's claims to intellectual preeminence among Śāktas nor attempt to demonstrate that it is more Vedic or more Tantric than other sects. Such issues, however important they may be to the theologian, are not matters for the historian of religion. Rather, we will examine the key Tantric elements of Śrīvidyā brought out in the *Tripurā Upaniṣad,* as Bhāskararāya understands the text, and consider his interpretations in light of the general descriptions of Tantrism already outlined.[53] Before proceeding to a verse-by-verse analysis of the text, we shall first provide an outline of *Tripurā Upaniṣad*'s structure and take up the investigation of its Tantric elements thematically.

The Basic Structure and Content of *Tripurā Upaniṣad*

Viewing the *Tripurā Upaniṣad* as a single, coherent scripture requires not only a complex rationalization on the part of Bhāskararāya, the commentator, but an effort of imagination on the part of the reader. The relationship between verses and the text's arcane theological expressions is hardly self-evident. While Bhāskararāya sees the Upaniṣad as a whole and offers his own reasons for linking verses together, he attributes the text's conceptual or linguistic obscurity to the use of Vedic language. Further, he suggests that as *śruti, Tripurā Upaniṣad* is exempt from those standards of logical consistency and linguistic clarity that can be expected in the treatise (*śāstra*) format.[54] This is not to say that *Tripurā Upaniṣad* lacks thematic continuity but only that its conceptual structure does not depend on a specific order of presentation. One could conceivably reorder the text's verses and create a more coherent presentation.[55]

First a few remarks on the text's internal structure as it presents itself to us. Composed of sixteen couplets in the common *śloka* meter, the *Tripurā Upaniṣad* appears to imitate the structure of the Śrīvidyā school's root mantra (*mūlamantra*).[56] The *śrīvidyā,* the root mantra and the source from which the school takes its name, is formulated in either fifteen- or sixteen-syllable configurations. A discussion of the mantra and the role of mantra in Tantric *sādhana* is a thematic consideration taken up later. The point to be emphasized here is simply that the text itself as a series of sixteen elements is in the shape of the *śrīvidyā* mantra. Just as the *śrīvidyā* mantra is likely to have been originally fifteen syllables, to which is appended a sixteenth, so the Upaniṣad's sixteenth verse seems to have been appended to an original text of fifteen to imitate this pattern. The symbolic pattern of a sixteenth added to a fifteenth syllable is repeated elsewhere in Śrīvidyā and appears to follow the more common pattern in the Hindu tradition of a fourth appended to sets of threes.[57] As noted earlier, the "fourth" (*turya*) is added to the three states of consciousness discussed in *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad,* just as a fourth *āśrama* (*sannyāsa*) or a fourth Veda (i.e., the *Atharva*) appears to have been added to previous sets of three. Verse 16 of the *Tripurā Upaniṣad* reads:

> This is the great Upaniṣad [in the form of statements expounding the secret meaning] of [the goddess] Tripurā. The Supreme Indestructible [Brahmā] praises that [Upaniṣad] which is the Supreme Knowledge [that] this *Ṛg* [Veda] and the *Yajur, Sāma, Atharva* [Vedas] and other [sources contain]. *AUṂ!*

Verse 16, while extolling the greatness of the text and affirming its value for liberation, adds little either theologically or ritually to the core fifteen verses. Though Bhāskararāya and other commentators never suggest that the last verse is interpolated, it appears likely that the author(s)/compiler(s) took note of the basic "fifteen plus one" symbolic pattern and adapted it to the text as a whole.

Bhāskararāya states in concluding remarks on verse 16 that *Tripurā Upaniṣad*'s companion text, the *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra,* is designed to supplement one's understanding of external ritual and theology, i.e., external sacrifice (*bahiryāga*). The relationship between the Upaniṣad and the *Kalpasūtra,* perhaps the most important ritual source in Śrīvidyā tradition, also reinforces the relationship between *Tripurā* and *Bhāvana Upaniṣad.* The latter, Bhāskararāya says, deals with internal sacrifice (*antaryāga*). Thus, the two Upaniṣads are juxtaposed as complements, each helping to explain the ritual prescriptions of the other. Further, their complementary themes suggest to us why Bhāskararāya choose these two particular Śākta Upaniṣads when several others of equal theological importance were available.[58] Bhāskararāya summarizes the significance of *Tripurā Upaniṣad* when he says near the very end of his comment on verse 16:

> Among the eighteen traditional sciences (*vidyā*s) only four [i.e., the four Vedas] are mentioned here; by the word 'other' [used in verse 16] the [remaining] fourteen are indicated.
>
> The meaning is that this Upaniṣad is the essence (*svarūpa*) of everything.

Bhāskararāya further suggests that *Tripurā Upaniṣad* is the essence (*svarūpa*) of reality because it ends with the sacred sound *AUṂ*. Thus, the text, either considered in itself as a mantra or as containing the root mantra of the Vedas, contains all forms of knowledge. It is in form, that is, *as an utterance,* the very form of reality (*svarūpa*) in its *śabdabrahman* aspect. There is, he says, no more subtle or higher expression available to those born into this world.

To appreciate Bhāskararāya's hermeneutical stance we must keep in mind his priorities regarding the Upaniṣad as a form (*svarūpa*) of knowledge. His view balances two seemingly contradictory positions. As revelation (*śruti)* the Upaniṣad is both (1) a mantric form of knowledge as it is "heard" and uttered, and (2) a revealed expression of knowledge that, like other texts, is in need of skilled interpretation. The Upaniṣad is simultaneously a "species" of knowledge as sound *and* a scripture to be read in conjunction with other texts. It is infallible in content but nonetheless elliptical in meaning. Thus, the Upaniṣad as part of Veda is both an index of reality in its most sublime form and a set of linguistic signs in Sanskrit that have sense and context.

For Bhāskararāya this twofold hermeneutic is a key to understanding knowledge as *the* liberative force. Yet unlike other nondualist interpreters, such as Śaṅkara, Bhāskararāya weighs both the Upaniṣad's liberative value as a mantra (i.e., as *śabda*) and as a meaningful expression (*artha*), which reveals truth when correctly interpreted. The two aspects of scripture are, in his view, bound to one another; they are, like Śiva and Śakti, distinct yet complementary. He says: "Because this [Upaniṣad] has the form (*rūpa*) of Brahman of which words cannot begin [to describe], the scriptures intentionally prefer to remain silent. . . . The intention is that more than this secret cannot be divulged."[59]

Wherever we locate the *Tripurā Upaniṣad* in the history and canons of Tantric literature, for Bhāskararāya the text is utterly transhistorical. The Upaniṣad is not bound by time or limited by the conventions of interpretation. It is not only something that may be read and interpreted but an articulation of *śabdabrahman*; it is a material and verbal embodiment of Truth. From Bhāskararāya's standpoint, the Upaniṣad's importance as scripture goes beyond an exegetical interest in the Śrīvidyā tradition's most essential teachings on external sacrifice (*bahiryāga*). When the text is "heard" not only as words with cognitive meaning but as a mantric manifestation of Revealed Truth (*śruti*), its verbal form, he says, is such that "more than this secret cannot be divulged." This rather extraordinary role of the text as a "verbal icon" will require further discussion in the Conclusion.

Bhāskararāya states that what is obscurely formulated within the text as "secret teaching" (i.e., *upaniṣad*) is made explicit in the *Paraśurāma*

Kalpasūtra (*PKS*). As a manual of practical, ritual prescriptions and interpretations, the *Kalpasūtra* links Śrīvidyā's theological speculation to specific forms of spiritual discipline. However, *PKS,* like *Tripurā Upaniṣad,* provides only a model upon which specific interpretations are formulated. Its ritual prescriptions are significantly modified in the handbooks (*paddhati* or *nibandha*) that provide the liturgies of ritual that define Śrīvidyā lineages (*paramparā*). Here we observe how the catholic Tantric tradition in its most universal textual expressions provides only an outline of teachings actually transmitted within lineages. While basic theological notions remain consistent, ritual prescriptions differ significantly within lineages, even when similar theological positions are held. While the Upaniṣad or the *Kalpasūtra* may, for example, be recited as ritual elements within Śrīvidyā liturgies, we should not assume that they prescribe the forms of ritual, except in the most general sense. Further, ritual handbooks may function more descriptively than prescriptively: to study the practice of Tantrics requires one to consider what texts *say,* what adepts *think* they say, and what adepts actually *do.* As in the case with any religious tradition, we should not assume that Tantrics actually do what they say they do.

Bhāskararāya's correlation between *Tripurā Upaniṣad* and the *Kalpasūtra* is neither ambiguous nor arbitrary: the highest knowledge expressed verbally in the form of the Upaniṣad is efficacious only when understood in practical, ritual prescriptions. As a Vaidika exegete he aims to elucidate the Upaniṣad's esoteric knowledge. His foremost concern as a Tantric, however, is to bring this knowledge into a practical framework. Bhāskararāya's engagement with scripture is part of an effort to construct and interpret the basic elements of Tantric theology and practice from the fragments of Vedic revelation (*śruti*).

A Brief Review of Internal Structure and a Verse Summary

An overview of the Upaniṣad's internal structure will summarize its broad, thematic elements. Verses 1 through 5 introduce the goddess Tripurā as the Supreme Śakti and treat her in the three specific forms characteristic of Śākta Tantrism's triadic theology: (1) the physical, anthropomorphic icon (*sthūlarūpa*), (2) the subtle sound or mantric manifestation (*sūkṣmarūpa*), and (3) the transcendent diagrammatic or yantric form (*parārūpa*). Bhāskararāya, in his introduction to verse 1, summarizes these three forms without mentioning the specific names or forms of the goddess, mantra, or yantra he has in mind. These specifics he takes up in his exegesis of the verses. He relates the triadic forms of the goddess to the two types of spiritual discipline (*sādhana*) he will discuss further in the later portions of the commentary. He writes:

> There are three forms of deity: physical (*sthūla*), subtle (*sūkṣma*) and supreme (*parā*). Now the first [physical anthropomorphic form of the deity] is described in its respective meditative verses (*dhyānaśloka*); the second [subtle form] consists of the [particular deity's] respective root-mantra (*mūlamantra*); the third [supreme or transcendent form] consists of contemplative worship [of the deity's *yantra*]. Because deities are threefold in form, contemplative worship (*upāsti*) is divided threefold respectively into external sacrifice (*bahiryāga*) [performed primarily to the physical form of the deity], silent repetition (*japa*) [on the subtle form root-mantra] and internal sacrifice (*antaryāga*) [in the form of contemplative worship (*upāsti*) of the *yantra*].[60]

These remarks form the thematic outline of Bhāskararāya's commentary. With his broad theological agenda stated in the introduction, the topically diverse and thematically disjointed verses are tied together by their conceptual relationship to the goddess's triadic form and the Tantric's two basic types (internal and external) of contemplative worship (*upāsana* or *upāsti*). Never far away from Bhāskararāya's thoughts, it seems, is the idea that the Upaniṣad reveals the ultimate Truth in both an eternal sense and in a performative sense: the Upaniṣad's teachings are efficacious when acted upon by the qualified. The Tantric adept's aim is to perfect contemplative worship (*upāsana*), and thereby gain worldly power and liberative insight.

The first five verses concentrate on identifying the goddess Tripurā's anthropomorphic name and form with her particular transcendent (*parā*) *yantra* form, the diagrammatical manifestation known as the *śrīcakra* or *śrīyantra* (see the Appendix). Verse 6 can be interpreted in two ways. It should be construed as either returning to a specific discussion of Tripurā as she takes on other characteristics and names, since it introduces the name "Lalitā" and centers on her relationship with Śiva, or as summarizing the previous five verses since it locates the goddess in her transcendent aspect, the *śrīcakra,* at specific cites of Hindu pilgrimage. Bhāskararāya surmises that the fifteen goddesses mentioned in the verse and in his citation of the *Padmapurāṇa* represent the fifteen syllables of the *śrīvidyā* mantra as well as the "seats" (*pīṭha*) of her worship.[61] In this way, he fuses the speculative and the practical. Each geographical place of pilgrimage becomes a locus of the divine and each is identified with Mount Sumeru, the mythological mountain at the center of the universe. Mount Sumeru is thus identified as the *bindu* at the center of the *śrīcakra*.

Verse 7 shifts its subjects more dramatically by turning to the ritual use of wine in the worship of the *śrīcakra*.[62] Bhāskararāya prefaces the verse by saying that its purpose is to introduce the contemplative worship (*upāsana*) of the goddess as it centers on her mantra and *yantra*. He avoids a prolonged debate concerning the appropriateness of the *pañcamakāra*. Instead, he emphasizes contemplative worship (*upāsana*) as the highest form of spiritual practice; *upāsana*, he says, entails both external (*bahir-*) and internal (*antar-*) types of sacrifice (*yāga*). He goes on to detail the prerequisites, types of practice, and goals of contemplative worship as an introduction to the discussion that follows in verses 8 to 15.

Because the Upaniṣad is Vedic *śruti*, Bhāskararāya explains the characteristically Tantric prescription for wine in verse 7 by adopting the technical vocabulary of the ritualist Pūrva Mīmāṃsakas. He addresses here the issue of the various qualifications (*adhikāra*) for this type of Tantric practice, comparing them to those required for Vedic ritual. By creating an analogy between Tantric and Vedic rituals he implicitly legitimizes the text's Tantric prescriptions—at least for those qualified to reap its esoteric wisdom. Ancient Vedic traditions, we should note, have no taboos against the ingestion of liquor or nonvegetarian food in specific ritual settings. There can be little doubt that Bhāskararāya sees this point as a way of correlating Vedic and Tantric traditions.

Verses 8 and 9 form a unit. Each presents a form of the root-mantra (*mūlamantra*) that embodies the subtle verbal manifestation of the supreme goddess, Tripurasundarī. Bhāskararāya notes that the respective forms of the root-mantra specify different traditions within Śrīvidyā, not different goddesses. He elsewhere identifies the *śrīvidyā* with the Vedic *gāyatrī*, the most sacred of Vedic mantras, and identifies the *śrīvidyā* as its superior hidden (*rahasya*) form. This identification of the *śrīvidyā* with the *gāyatrī* is yet another example of his efforts to locate Śrīvidyā's Tantrism within the traditions of Vedic interpretation. We should note, however, that Bhāskararāya does not argue for this mantric identification: he simply declares it as a matter of fact.

Verse 10 would appear to belong with the first five verses. It too introduces the imagery of the "sixteenth," which culminates in the two forms of the fifteen-syllable *śrīvidyā* mantra cryptically encoded in verses 8 and 9. Verse 10 also situates the mantra's subtle (*sūkṣma*) form *within* the transcendent (*parā*) *śrīcakra*. Bhāskararāya identifies the verbal and diagrammatic images with the anthropomorphic figure of Tripurā and views each as a complementary ritual element.

Verses 11 and 12 raise two of the most important and controversial issues in Tantrism, especially within the brāhmaṇically oriented Śrīvidyā school. Verse 11 deals with *kāmakalādhyāna,* literally, "meditation on the aspect of desire," in which the focus is on feminine physiology, with special attention given to a meditation on the eroticism of the breasts and genitalia. Underlying this practice is the notion that the Tantric, by meditating on the erotic feminine form, partakes of the bliss (*ānanda*) of the divine and transforms sensual, worldly experience into a vehicle of liberation. In what may seem an ironic twist to the uninitiated, Bhāskararāya grounds the practice in a rigorously ascetical ritual interpretation. He makes *kāmakalā* meditation a part of the symbolism of the *śrīcakra* as a ritual object. Nevertheless, it is this dual relationship between the erotic and the ascetic that characterizes Tantric discipline, much as it does the mythology of Śiva in nonesoteric traditions.[63]

Verse 12 deals with the use of the *pañcamakāra* by listing the five elements and detailing their ritual roles. For anti-Kaula Śrîvidyā adepts, and especially for Lakṣmīdhara and the Samayins, these two verses raise the gravest doubts concerning the text's authenticity as Vedic revelation (*śruti*). Some conservative contemporary adepts suggest that because the two distinctively Kaula prescriptions dealing with *kāmakalā* meditation and the *pañcamakāra* follow one another they are, in fact, interpolations. However, to Bhāskararāya and Kaula-oriented adepts these verses reconfirm the fact that Tantric elements have been part of Hindu tradition from the time of the Vedas' first revelation. Other elements, he observes, such as the *śrīvidyā* mantra, also have precedents in Vedic literature.[64]

Verses 13 through 15 return to the goddess in her triadic forms, especially concentrating on her physical attributes and their relationship to external forms of ritual practice. Verse 14 affirms the ontological identity and relationship of Śakti with her consort, Śiva. This theological statement of relationship is then linked in verse 15 to the method for practical realization through the performance of ritual and meditation. Bhāskararāya discusses at length here the connection between theological images and the various paths, stages, and levels of attainment suggested by the text. In what is by now a familiar exegetical technique, he raises only the basic points of doctrine and interpretation and then refers to other sources for more elaborate explanation.

The Thematic Study of Hindu Tantrism and Śrīvidyā

Qualification, Initiation, and the Guru

Quoting the *Paramānanda Tantra,* Rāmeśvara Sūri, a nineteenth-century Śrīvidyā adept who claims in his commentary on the *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra* to represent the lineage of Bhāskararāya, says that "the first step of the palace of liberation (*mukti*) is initiation (*dīkṣā*)."[65] The disciple worthy of initiation, he continues, is a paradigm of virtue, one no longer driven by material desires but by the urge to find liberative truth.[66] The guru must likewise meet extraordinary moral, intellectual, and spiritual requirements, including a thorough knowledge of the texts (*śāstra*) and tradition (*āgama*). Most important, the guru must be one who has had a direct experience (*anubhava*) of the Truth. Later in the same text, Rāmeśvara states explicitly that without initiation one is not entitled to perform the contemplative worship of Śrīvidyā.[67]

In true Tantric style, Bhāskararāya includes among potential adepts persons not born into the three estates (*traivarṇika*). He also places further restrictions on instruction by remarking that a Vedic birthright does not necessarily entitle one to learn the Tantric Śrīvidyā. He writes:

> The quality of being a knower [of the tradition] . . . is a property delimiting the generic character of being qualified. . . . This is why the statement in the *Samayācārasmṛti* applies: "Twice-born persons without initiation into the tradition (*kula*) are not qualified."[68]

The requirements for initiation into Tantric *sādhana* are distinguished from those for Vedic rites, distinctions which Bhāskararāya upholds. While he does not address directly the relative superiority of the Tantric path, he affirms it unambiguously.[69] And since the Upaniṣad is both a Vedic and a Tantric text, Bhāskararāya must handle deftly the different types of qualification. Since non-twice-born persons may, under special circumstances, study the Upaniṣad as a Tantric text, he has already extended the boundaries of interpretation beyond the limits set forth by conservative non-Tantric Vaidikas. Yet those who do not meet Tantric standards of qualification may, by birthright as twice-born persons, be entitled to study the Upaniṣad as *śruti.* To resolve the apparent dilemma that permits non-Tantric Vaidikas to enter into the Upaniṣad's Tantric teachings and Tantrics without a birthright qualification for *śruti* to study the Upaniṣad, he maintains that its most secret interpretations are received only orally and directly from a guru. For example, regarding the role of initiation into Vedic and Tantric mantras, he says:

> In some places the *gāyatrī* [mantra], the Mother of the Vedas, is recited aloud even though it is the same [from the esoteric point of view as the *śrīvidyā* and thus secret and not recited aloud.] And her [mantra, i.e., the *śrīvidyā*] some instruct by words other than explicit syllables in order to convey the mantra's deep secrecy (*atirahasyatvam*). Through this it is suggested that the qualified person and their actions are likewise [kept secret].[70]

Qualified aspirants, Bhāskararāya says, go beyond the ordinary requirements observed in the Vedas and have a particular type of personality. They must have faith (*bhakti*) in their teachers, their traditions, and in the efficacy of Tantric rituals. But, in order to qualify for Tantric initiation, they must be willing to commit themselves to the rigors of contemplative worship (*upāsana*) and seek direct personal knowledge (*bhavanajñāna*). This personal disposition is the decisive factor for determining Tantric qualification, not the aspirant's birth as a twice-born male.

> But despite the real presence (*devatāsadbhāva*) of deities, believers wavering in faith due to the karma of previous births are qualified only for the rituals (*karma*) described in the initial (*pūrva*) section [of the Veda] and are not [qualified] for contemplative worship (*upāsana*) of deities.[71]

Later in the Upaniṣad, however, he intimates that the issue of qualification for *sādhana* does not rest merely on matters of Vedic birthright and Tantric disposition. Rather, he says, there is a difference between exoteric and esoteric forms of knowledge. "Because this mantra [and the concomitant teaching] is deeply secret it should be learned only at the feet of a teacher."[72]

He observes that while the Vedic teaching is a right and an obligation of the twice-born castes (*dvija* or *traivarṇika,* he uses both terms), the motivation for wanting Tantric instruction must be scrutinized by the guru. The guru, he says, should act judiciously or face the consequences:

> one's own views should be gradually revealed to those in whom the ripening of the mind is observed to be firm by their ritual practices (*karma*) in many [previous] births as prescribed

> in the initial (*pūrva*) [sections of the Veda], but only after analyzing such persons carefully. Otherwise there is danger of breaking the tradition (*sampradāya*). Those various levels (*bhūmikabheda*) leading up to the contemplative worship (*upāsti*) of [the goddess] Tripurasundarī I have presented in detail [elsewhere].[73]

Vedic prescriptions may also be useful for determining qualification for Tantric practices inasmuch as they deal with mental dispositions. However, Vedic qualification is contingent on other factors, specifically on an individual's birth as a male *traivarṇika*. There are, Bhāskararāya observes, those who want Tantric initiation for the wrong reasons. Such people should be distinguished from the truly qualified. Since Tantric *sādhana* guarantees enjoyment (*bhukti*) as well as liberation (*mukti*) in one's present birth, the guru must discern the aspirants' motivations. Those who seek enjoyment or worldly accomplishments (*siddhi*) alone will not know how to exercise properly this power once acquired: "[there are] low people who undertake [this] path due to their desirous or passionate nature [that] binds [them]. . . . Those who without desires, having a sharp intellect, undertake [this path] are uplifted. . . ."[74]

Two factors, Bhāskararāya observes, prevent the unqualified individual from gaining access to potentially dangerous or unhealthy Tantric teachings. First is the individual's own receptivity and abilities. There are built-in checks and balances, results of the law of karma, that prevent the merely curious or the ill-equipped from learning Tantric secrets. Further, the texts protect themselves, as it were, by preventing the noninitiated from gaining access to teachings.

The second factor that prevents the unqualified from gaining access to Tantric teaching is an expression of Tantric esotericism, namely, the guru's power of discretionary action. The guru, Bhāskararāya observes, knows precisely what level of teaching is appropriate for a given individual and what should and should not be said. The Tantric concept is exemplary of the method of skillful means (*upāya*)—better known for its significance in shaping Buddhist tradition—in which each individual is instructed at his or her own particular level. Disciples of the same teacher may hear and receive teachings that are sometimes dramatically different in content.

> In a situation in which those diligent in ritual actions are yet without any special ripening of the mind, the conviction (*viśvāsa*) to perform [contemplative worship (*upāsana*) of a

> deity] won't occur . . . those following the higher path should maintain the views of the lower and it is imperative that they not reveal their own opinions.[75]

Since only the guru determines who is qualified for initiation, the first step for the prospective Tantric is to find a suitable guru—not a topic raised in the Upaniṣad but discussed at length in its companion, the *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra.* Once accepted as a student, the disciple must offer the guru absolute and unswerving devotion.[76] It is simply not possible for the truly qualified teacher to be in error since he or she, as Bhāskararāya observes in the opening salutation to *Tripurā Upaniṣad,* is none other than Śiva in the form of the Teacher (*Śrīnātha*).[77]

Further, Śrīvidyā, like most Tantric schools, advocates devotion to a single teacher (*ekagurūpāsti*) for all Tantric instruction. Though many Tantrics, including the great Abhinavagupta, received instruction from teachers other than their professed guru, Bhāskararāya holds that Tantrics may receive only non-Tantric education from those other than the one guru.[78] The responsibility of the guru to evaluate and care for the disciple is emphasized at every stage of teaching and practice. Not only is there a fear of breaking the tradition should the guru fail to make the proper choices for initiation, there is a possibility that the individual aspirant will suffer great personal harm. The guru should take precautions to avert any unnecessary confusion, a position not simply applicable to Tantric teachings. Bhāskararāya says,

> Destructive logic [shows the guru that] if doubt arises in that object on which one depended previously then there occurs a loss of both [one's previous faith and that which has not yet been fully understood]. Hence, in order to protect those [dependent on ritual actions alone for their faith] even contemplative worshippers (*upāsakas*) should [continue to] perform rituals (*karma*) in the same way, as if they had conviction [in their absolute efficacy]. It is with this intention [Kṛṣṇa] states in the *Bhagavadgītā*], "You must act considering everyone's welfare" . . . "One should not bring about confusion in the minds of the ignorant attached to action."[79]

But what incentives are there for the individual to make a commitment to a guru and to a rigorous discipline involving personal self-denial and daily practice? The effort required for success in contemplative worship (*upāsana*) raises the stakes for the individual willing to make the commitment. The goals of the path are worldly prosperity, power over nature and society, and final liberation (*mokṣa*) from the cycles of rebirth in the present life; these, Śrīvidyā maintains, are virtually guaranteed to the committed adept, who moves steadily up the ladder of contemplative worship (*upāsti*). In the end there is nothing less than ultimate fulfillment: a constant and undiminished experience of the world as blissful (*ānanda*).

> Therefore those qualified persons who have attained the [higher] stages [through contemplative worship (*upâsana*) realize] the individual self (*jīvātman*) is different than the inner mental process (*antaḥkaraṇa*); when the obstacles of the inner mental process are removed and the experience of Brahman [is obtained], what else remains [for one to achieve]?[80]

Śrīvidyā and Tantric Theology: Doctrinal Formulations

Śākta Tantric theology presents a type of theistic nondualism (*advaita*). Bhāskararāya writes:

> She appears out of compassion for her devotees only imaginatively as having qualities, while what is suggested [in verse 13] is that ultimately her form is without qualities. . . .[81] Though it [i.e., the godhead] is twofold [in its masculine and feminine aspects] when meditated upon as having qualities, [this appearance is for the sake of] accomplishing the three aims [of human existence (*puruṣārtha*): duty (*dharma*), prosperity (*artha*), and pleasure (*kāma*)].[82]

Reality's original condition was, and in some sense continues to be, ultimately One. But, by its own conscious will (*icchā-*), act (*kriyā-*), and knowledge (*jñānaśakti*), as well as for its own pleasure (*ānanda*) and for the pleasure of the beings it created, the Absolute Brahman took the form of a binary divinity. Through the Deity's bifurcation into masculine and feminine aspects the multifarious names and forms of the Universe gradually devolve. Understanding the universe is, for the Tantric, a process of reconciling dualistic appearances with ultimate unity. Bhāskararāya's descriptions of the cosmogonic process move back and forth between his two perspectives of the world: the universe is, at once, both unified and diverse in its manifestations. The distinction Bhāskararāya draws is between the nature of Brahman as unified and the forms of Brahman, which appear diverse. "Even though the initial modification (*vṛtti*) is not different from [the Absolute unity of] Brahman, it is said to have the forms of knowledge (*jñāna*), will (*icchā*), and action (*kṛti*)."[83]

Creation, as it were, is a real transformation (*pariṇāma*) of Brahman and the Ultimate is both identical to and different from the diverse universe (*bhedābheda*).[84] Brahman is identical to the manifest dualistic world in the sense that the divine *is* the universe in both its material and efficient causal aspects; and it is different inasmuch as the transformation of the One into Many is a deliberate act of the Godhead, who remains unaffected.[85] Sākta Tantrics accept the explanation given by Abhinavagupta: "There is said to be [true] unity where duality, unity and both unity and duality are equally manifest. To those objecting that in that case diversity (*bheda*) must also exist, [we say:] so be it; let us not necessarily elaborate."[86]

According to Bhāskararāya, understanding the expansion (*prapañca*) of Brahman as it assumes the form of the binary masculine/feminine godhead requires a subtle distinction, if not an intellectual sleight of hand. He is particularly interested in reconciling the differences between nondualists, especially between Tantrics and Vedāntins such as Śaṅkara (*kevalādvaita*)—not particularly a concern of earlier Tantrics. He dismisses the disagreements between nondualists as mere products of ignorance (*avidyā*), and yet he is careful to make his own position clear.[87] In his auto-commentary on the *Varivasyārahasya*, 1.3, he writes:

> The Vāmakeśvara Tantra says, "When that [Śiva as Śakti] is in the state of transformation (*pariṇāma*), nothing else is Supreme [other than Śakti]." Statements such as, "the change really pertains only to speech" in the *śruti* are in accord with the statement [in Vāmakeśvara Tantra].
>
> Between Śakti and the possessor of Śakti is [the relation] of cause and effect and in this respect [the created world] is not different [from its cause]. And not even in the Upaniṣads is difference-and-non-difference [actually intended, but rather pure non-difference]. Therefore, [when the *śruti* says,] "All this is verily Brahman" it indicates [only] non-difference and [presents] no contradiction.[88]

Bhāskararāya's position is simple enough: the change or transformation of the One into Two and then into Many is real. At the same time, the *notion* of a difference existing in these relations is unreal. Thus, the forms of the manifest world are real while the concepts we construct to distinguish them ultimately are not. This particular difference-in-identity theory is known as *avikāraparināmavāda* or the doctrine of unmodified transformation.

Viewed theologically, Śakti as the dynamic force of desire (*icchā*), action (*kriyā*), and knowledge (*jñāna*) modifies herself to become the universe. Simultaneously, her union with Śiva is undisturbed.[89] Thus, the Śākta views creation in two ways: it is real in both cause and effect inasmuch as it is identical to its source; and it is unreal in its duality, which is merely the product of a person's delimiting ignorance (*avidyā*). Bhāskararāya assures his readers that this seemingly paradoxical view is tenable: "The primary authority is the [Vedic *śruti*] and the faithful followers of the *śruti* are the Tantras which advocate only non-dualism (*advaita*). Therefore, what is contrary to this [position of nondualism] such as the difference between cause and effect may be imagined but [such difference] does not apply to the whole universe."[90]

As the Tantric adept sees it, the highest of human aspirations is to re-cognize (*pratyabhijñā*) the original relationship of identity and difference between the human and the divine. One must imitate the divine act of creation by controlling and developing human will, action, and knowledge through *sādhana*. The adept thus assumes the three divine characteristics of will, action, and knowledge as part of his or her own personality in order to bring them into an active discipline (*sādhana*) based on outward (*bahir-*) and inward (*antar-*) forms of ritual sacrifice (*yāga*). This includes mastering yoga techniques, cultivating various types of meditation involving mantras, and becoming adept in complex ritual and devotional formulas aimed at identifying with the physical, verbal (*mantra*), and transcendent (*yantra*) aspects of the divine. According to Bhāskararāya's Kaula tradition of Śrīvidyā, the Tantric who is adept in the techniques for the external worship of the image, mantra, and *yantra* should never completely abandon any of the forms used in the various stages of *sādhana*.

> In fact, equal importance [should be given to] each of the three [forms] of contemplative worship (*upāsti*). Even though with regard to the three prescriptions [to worship the goddess in physical, subtle (mantra), and transcendent (*yantra*) forms] where the results of each are said to be individually different, there is no means of deciding which is the relevant [or privileged] one when the fruits of worship (*upāsti*) in general are declared—just as in the case of the six types of [Vedic] fire sacrifice [within the *daśapūrṇimāsa* rites] in which the results are accrued collectively and not severally.[91]

From ritual actions (*karma*) and love of God (*bhakti*) one gains a direct knowledge (*jñāna*) of the One in ascending stages of realization. Bhāskararāya describes the Tantric path as a combination of actions, including ritual actions, devotion (*bhakti*), and the acquisition of insight (*jñāna*).

> [Some] authors have stated that the various methods [described] in the active path (*karmamārga*), the knowledge path (*jñānāmārga*), and the path of devotion (*bhaktimārga*) are mutually contradictory. It is to clear to those who know the texts that all [three of] these [methods], because they are difficult to practice, yield results only [when combined] over a long period [of *sādhana*].[92]

From the devotional perspective, Tantrism in all three of its basic denominational forms—Śaivism, Śāktism, and Vaiṣṇavism—is characterized by the intense, emotional, and sensual *bhakti* that dominates Purāṇic Hinduism from the medieval period onward. The Śākta's rationalist philosophy in no way diminishes the devotional fervor characteristic of its rituals. As a contemporary adept explains:

> We follow the famous dictum [appearing in the *Kaula Upaniṣad*] that we should remain like Vaiṣṇavas for worldly purposes, like Śaivas in outward appearance, and like Śāktas inwardly. This means that we should act with a passionate commitment to the world, especially in our acts of devotion. This provides an example for others and prevents us from becoming degenerate in our practices. Outwardly we should be unattached; like Śiva, we should not care for pleasures or become too emotional in our failures. We keep our Śākta *sādhana* to ourselves [that is, leave it a private and inward practice]; otherwise, people will be constantly after us to provide for them—Everyone knows that Śāktas have great power.[93]

Bhāskararāya asserts that it is finally a direct experience (*anubhava*), the result of pursuing knowledge (*jñāna*), which provides the adept with access to the power and bliss originating in the primordial source of the universe. Yet the Tantric, for all appearances' sake, remains a part of the universe's diverse manifestations. *Sādhana* entails a gradual rather than a sudden realization and promises the adept increasing influence over the multiple names and forms of creation. As one assimilates the individual personality into the divine, there develops an insight that allows the adept to function in the world and yet remain entirely aloof from the appearances of degenerative change. Rather than an experience of complete isolation or dissociation from the world, as Patañjali's Yoga would suggest, the adept achieves the divine recognition of an identity-and-difference relationship with the world. Put in classic Upaniṣadic terms, as the adept's true nature as *ātman* gradually attains identity with Brahman, he or she simultaneously achieves complete unity with the divine and a realization of the Creator/Creation relationship between the One and the Many.

Likewise, ritually oriented experiences are gradually extended beyond formal boundaries to the point at which the everyday also becomes part of the Tantric's ritual life. The final stage of realization, Bhāskararāya tells us, entails a complete sense of freedom both in the active, worldly life and beyond:

> And hence the only method [that is truly effective proceeds through] a series of stages (*ullāsa*) adopted through repeated practice and one's consumption of ritual offerings. In this regard, the formulated rules should be [followed] up to the mature stage (*prauḍhollāsa*), after which it is as one pleases; in the last stage one obtains Brahman's very form (*brahmasvarūpatā*).[94]

In sum, we can say that Hindu Tantric *sādhana* is directed to two related ends: worldly prosperity (*bhukti*) and empowerment (*siddhi*), and final human liberation (*mukti* or *mokṣa*) from the cycles of death and birth. The prevailing concern of the Tantric adept is an expeditious and effective path that fulfills all four traditional human aspirations (*puruṣārtha*): duty (*dharma*), material prosperity (*artha*), sensual pleasure (*kāma*), and final liberation (*mokṣa*) in one's present life.

Not all Tantric discipline is channeled directly to obtaining the fourth aim of liberation—at any one of its five ascending levels. Frequently, a great deal of energy and effort is expended to obtain worldly and material aims. With regard to the classical Hindu prescriptions concerning one's station (*āśrama*) in life and one's worldly profession, the acquisition of material wealth (*artha*) or pleasure (*kāma*) is viewed as a part of the balanced life. Seen in Tantric terms, reality is essentially and ultimately one and thus any distinction between material and spiritual goals or desires is valid only insofar as it guides the adept to a more useful and productive form of *sādhana*. Because the world itself is a transformation of Brahman in the form of bliss (*ānanda*), those human endeavors that involve pleasure or material satisfaction can also be legitimately included in Tantric *sādhana*. It is in the power of sensual aids to create a proximate experience of the Absolute as immanent in the world that Tantrics justify these forms of *sādhana*. A proximate experience of bliss (*ānanda*), they maintain, is achieved through erotic or sensual ritual practices.[95] As the adept draws closer to the primordial source of reality, and approaches the goal of microcosmic/macrocosmic identification of the individual soul with the Absolute, the gap between proximate bliss (*ānanda*) and actual experience narrows as he or she becomes empowered *as* the divine Śakti.

Central to the Tantric notion of worldly empowerment is the acquisition of superhuman power that enables one to manipulate nature or society. However, these various abilities or "accomplishments" (*siddhi*), including the power to acquire virtually any worldly desire, are usually considered elementary or secondary accretions on the path leading to liberation.[96] These factors have led adepts to develop sets of criteria that distinguish various types of *sādhana* and allow for an internal evaluation of what constitutes "legitimate" Tantrism.[97]

Viewed critically, Tantric *sādhana* can be understood as a three-stage process. It is an effort to imitate, at the human level, the divine act of assuming binary forms and triadic manifestations. First, the adept *affirms* the reality of subject/object distinctions and assumes a subordinate position as a devotee on the path of devotion (*bhaktimārga*). This stage corresponds to the act of divine will (*icchāśakti*) by which creation is set in motion—the adept with clear conviction (*viśvāsa*) assumes a distinction between himself or herself and the Creator. From the distinction created at the first stage emerges an intelligible world of diverse names and forms. In the second stage the adept engages in various activities, concentrating primarily on ritual and study (*karmayoga*). This stage is comparable to divine action (*kriyāśakti*) in which distinctions are formally acknowledged so that they can be *dissolved*. In the third stage, through the power of insight comparable to divine knowledge (*jñānaśakti*), the adept is able to *reappropriate* the world's diverse names and forms, and act as the godhead acts. In this third stage, the adept by acquiring the power of knowledge (*jñānaśakti*) becomes the Creator, not a mere representative of the divine but a form of divinity. Through the acquisition of the three forms of divine power (will, action, and knowledge) the Tantric adept controls both his own destiny and the world. Beginning with an intellectual act, which affirms the world as both identical and different from Brahman, the adept systematically denies the false distinctions imposed by egoistic ignorance in order to reaffirm the distinction made between subject and object from the "new" perspective of divine knowledge.

These three types of cosmic function and path (*mārga*)—will, action, and knowledge—Tantrics understand to be a unified process in which theological speculation and practical discipline are woven inextricably together. Tantrics, such as Bhāskararāya, dismiss the discussion of the origins of human ignorance (*avidyā*) by asserting that ignorance itself is merely a product of a confused mind. Deep-rooted ignorance, which causes the appearance of a fracture from the divine, is a result of karmic misdeeds while confusion is Śiva's way of punishing or protecting the foolish.

While Śākta Tantric nondualism more closely aligns itself with the "combination doctrine" (*samuccayavāda*) and difference-in-identity theories (*bhedābheda*) of Bhāskara and Vedāntin and the Kashmiri Śaiva Trika schools, it is the more uncompromising absolute nondualism (*kevelādvaita*) of Śaṅkara (c. 700–750 C.E.) that Bhāskararāya most frequently refers to as authoritative. Undoubtedly, it is Śaṅkara's legendary association with Śrīvidyā and his attributed authorship of a host of popular Śākta works, including the historically influential *Saundaryalaharī,* that has influenced Bhāskararāya. For the Vaidika Tantric, an association of Śaṅkara with Śrīvidyā locates his esoteric tradition squarely within conventional, brahman-dominated *smārta* orthodoxy and also further enhances Śaṅkara's position—the coolly rational and austere Śaṅkara is made into a powerful and influential Tantric. Further, Śrīvidyā's identification with the Śāṅkara tradition reinforces the notion of a "double norm." Śaṅkara, like Bhāskararāya, is known for both his Tantric and his non-Tantric works.[98] An association with the Śāṅkara traditions allows intellectually austere Tantrics, like Bhāskararāya, to assert that worldly involvements and pleasures are strictly secondary to the higher goal of liberation. While he does not go so far as to advance the necessity of renunciation in obtaining liberation, a requirement as far as Śaṅkara is concerned, he is able to transform the ideal Śrīvidyā adept into a thoroughly worldly but at once restrained and ascetical figure. In this relatively late form of Tantrism, Bhāskararāya achieves a remarkable synthesis that reconciles the inherent conflict between renunciate (*sannyāsin*) and brahman householder ideals: the Tantric householder is himself an ideal ascetic, one who is completely in the world but not of it.

Like Śaṅkara, Śrīvidyā adepts are emphatic about going beyond a strictly intellectual form of Vedānta and calmly assert that one must also transcend the emotional outpourings of devotionalism (*bhakti*). Thus, they design Tantric *sādhana* not only to provide a path to liberation (*mokṣa*) but to encompass all four human aims (*puruṣārtha*). However, unlike the Śaṅkara who authored the commentary on the *Vedāntasūtras*, Tantrics see no necessary conflict between the first three "worldly" aims and the fourth aim, liberation.[99] Further, the fourth *āśrama* or stage in life, renunciation (*sannyāsa*), which Śaṅkara argues is not optional for those who desire liberation (*mumukṣu*), is not required for Śrīvidyā adepts.

Controversy concerning the value of formal *sannyāsa* continues to surround contemporary proponents of Śrīvidyā, though the Tantras themselves are quite clear on the subject.[100] Those who would align the Śrīvidyā system with the Vedānta of the Śāṅkara tradition and away from the literal teachings of the Tantras generally believe that one should either progress through the stages in life towards renunciation or, in exceptional cases, go from the celibate life of the student (*brahmācāra*) directly to *sannyāsa*. Others, who assume the views of the Tantras which openly reject renunciation, maintain that *sannyāsa* as a formal act is, at best, unnecessary for salvation and, at worst, a denial of the divine's essentially erotic act of creation. What need is there to renounce the world if the world is itself the manifestation of divinity?

Brahman's unity as well as its differentiation is the Śākta's most basic theological presupposition and is founded, as it were, on the experience (*anubhava*) of sages and the revelations of scripture. It is a matter revealed in the Veda (*śruti*) that will ultimately become the adept's own experience. While reason (*yukti*) plays an important role in the process, it is not, as it is for some Buddhist philosophers, the ultimate measure (*pramāṇa*) of one's understanding.[101] The Hindu Tantric, like the non-Tantric Vaidika, does not view human accomplishments as possible apart from traditional instruction. It is less clear, however, whether thinkers such as Bhāskararāya view the Vedic *śruti* as indispensable for final liberation.

Bhāskararāya's discussion of Brahman's initial expansion (*prapañca*) into a twofold Being places the theological focus on Śakti's relationship with Śiva. However, the divine's expansion from formless (*niṣkala*) Being is variously explained since Brahman's initial modification (*vṛtti*) simultaneously takes shape in a number of different ways.

In the initial act of self-differentiation the qualityless (*nirguṇa*), amorphous (*niṣkala*) Brahman first transforms itself into a single, Supreme Deity with a twofold masculine and feminine nature. From the creative valency of the female principle the universe emerges out of the substantial but static male component called *sadāśiva*. Thus, the feminine Śakti functions as the efficient cause of reality while the masculine Śiva is the material cause. Each of the two divine principles follows patterns and formulations that are both intelligible to us and intrinsic to them.

According to the Śrīvidyā school, Brahman's devolution can be explained both in terms of speculative concepts and through a specific set of verbal and visual images, foremost of which is the *śrīcakra*. Before turning to the *śrīcakra,* it is useful first to consider Bhāskararāya's remarks on Brahman's initial modification (*vṛtti*) and its subsequent expansion (*prapañca*) into names and forms. He writes:

> "That One thought: 'Let me be many; let me propagate.' " Thus the scripture (*śruti*) establishes Brahman's initial [act of] seeing is omniscient [and] that [Brahman as it initially creates the universe] has the form of desire and the form of action. In another scripture (*śruti*) [it says], "That desired, that performed austerity." [And also,] "knowledge, strength and action are inherent" is said in [yet another] scripture (*śruti*). Even though the initial modification (*vṛtti*) is not different from the [Absolute] Brahman it is said to have the form of knowledge (*jñāna*), desire (*icchā*), and action (*kṛti*).[102]

Bhāskararāya's subtlety is easily overlooked here by his appeal to Upaniṣadic teachings. Brahman *as it manifests* itself has certain principles and forms that are part of its nature. Though Brahman is as desireless as it is initially qualityless (*nirguṇa*), its form (*rūpa*) as such takes shape through desire (*icchā*) and not in spite of it. In other words, Brahman's initial creative act was prompted out of the divine desire of its complementary masculine and feminine forms. Creation, Bhāskararāya affirms, is the purposeful act of a willful Consciousness, it does not occur spontaneously or for no reason at all. Why, then, did creation happen? The Tantric answers that creative effulgence—the act of becoming and enjoying itself—is divinity's intrinsic nature.

Employing a different vocabulary, this time from Kashmiri Śaivism, Bhāskararāya describes the initial transformation of Brahman this way: "Brahman whose nature is luminosity (*prakāśātmanaḥ*) takes reflection (*vimarśa*) as its intrinsic nature; in the [Śaiva] Āgamas [reflection] is described as the nature of consciousness within conscious beings, born out of its own essence."[103]

In this case creation is understood as an act of divine Consciousness, or as a kind of divine self-cognition. Creation occurs when God achieves the initial recognition of self-consciousness, that is, when it literally *sees* itself in its mind's eye as a distinct entity. This self-awareness is but a reflection (*vimarśa*) of the One Brahman's pure illumination (*prakāśa*). Put differently, the ontological transformation of Brahman as Being (*sat*) is here considered as an epistemological event. Thus, the source of self-reflective consciousness is Brahman as Consciousness (*cit*).[104]

For the Tantric, ontological and epistemological understandings of Brahman's transformations are different ways of describing the same event. Manifesting itself as both pure consciousness (*prakāśa*) and self-reflective consciousness (*vimarśa*), the One Brahman takes shape as a binary divinity. Assuming the appearance of Śiva in an un-self-reflective masculine form, Śiva combines with Śakti in creative self-awareness. Unlike other nondualist traditions, in which the created universe is considered a mere illusion manufactured by *māyā* or a mere product of human ignorance, Śākta Tantrism maintains that the universe is itself a real form of divine Consciousness.

From a Śākta Tantric perspective, however, the goddess is undifferentiated Brahman as well as the self-conscious result of Brahman's differentiation. The goddess then is ultimately, like Brahman itself, neuter in gender or rather genderless. At the same time, she is a divine being who assumes all three genders: neuter, masculine, and feminine. The form in which she is worshiped is a matter of one's tradition, and is not a preference of the divinity. Bhāskararāya quotes *Kulārṇava Tantra* to make the point: "The Devī [i.e., the goddess] should be recalled either in the masculine form or conceived in the feminine form; otherwise one should meditate on the partless (*niṣkala*) characterized as consciousness and bliss."[105] He goes on to say: "the masculine and the feminine are of equal priority [thus meditation on one or the other] is an option [to be] chosen following one's own tradition (*sampradāya*)."[106]

If Bhāskararāya and other Tantrics believe that gender is genuinely insignificant and a matter of one's traditional instruction (*sampradāya*), why is the feminine form and, more specifically, the goddess Lalitā Tripurasundarī the best or most efficacious divinity to worship? Could not some other divinity be considered supreme? Bhāskararāya writes that "though they [i.e., Śiva and Śakti] are equal in granting [their devotees] what is desired [and] are related to one another as quality and substance, [Śiva] in his aspect (*amśaḥ*) as Creator of the Universe is dependent upon Śakti. . . . [it is by] meditating on the feminine aspect alone that one achieves the result."[107]

In another of his works, Bhāskararāya declares, "Devī is the means to attain one's own real nature."[108] In both examples he views the feminine principle as the creative center, one whose nature it is to initiate action. He repeats this general concept in the *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya* when he explains how divinity actually assumes the shape of the manifest universe. Brahman's modification, he observes, is not bifurcation but actually trifurcation: Śakti appears as will (*icchā*), action (*kriyā*), and knowledge (*jñāna*). Thus Brahman's incipient devolution from primordial unity is most appropriately called by the feminine gender term the "Three Cities," or Tripurā, the name of the goddess. Triadic forms, he says, are not only the most representative symbols of Brahman's devolution, they are the actual shape which Brahman has assumed. The goddess's gender, however, is not his foremost concern. Rather, it is its manifest power, which according to Śrīvidyā, comes to fruition in the form of the *śrīcakra.*

When discussing the *śrīcakra,* Śrīvidyā adepts generally eschew an interpretation that involves the suggestive sexual symbolism of its nine major intersecting triangles or the emerging *linga*-like *bindu* in the centermost triangle. Instead, Bhāskararāya focuses on the identification of its elements in more abstract symbolic relationship.

> Even though the *bindu cakra* [the "drop" in the center of the *śrīcakra,* is only one point,] it has a threefold nature. . . . The three deities created [and] not different from [her supreme] peaceful (*śānta*) [aspect] are [the three creative powers, namely,] *Icchāśakti, Jñānaśakti,* and *Kriyāśakti.* The female deities named *Vāmā, Jyeṣṭhā,* and *Raudrī* [identified with the three śaktis are complemented] by the three [male consort] forms of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Rudra which are not different creations from [her all-subsuming aspect called] Ambikā.[109]

Bhāskararāya offers several different types of explanations for divinity's expansion into a triadic form. In his commentary on the popular *Thousand Names of Lalitā* (*Lalitāsahasranāma*) he offers an epistemological explanation. This is best summarized by his succinct comment on Name 234. Here, he says, the goddess is called Tripurā because she is "the measurer, the measuring and the thing measured," or more directly, the knower, the process of knowing, and the object of knowledge.[110] In other words, the very triadic process by which we understand ourselves and the universe is the Divine's substantive form. While this epistemological explanation is not repeated in his commentary on *Tripurā Upaniṣad* (perhaps because epistemological issues are never raised in the text), he does offers two other types of explanation—one cosmological and the other soteriological. Each forms part of his interpretation of Tripurā.

Bhāskararāya's most briefly considered explanation of Tripurā's name and form concentrates on her anthropomorphic physical (*sthūla*) image. This forms the first element in the Tantric's triadic symbolism of divinity. Verse 13 of *Tripurā Upaniṣad,* with only minor variations, mirrors the description given in the meditational verse (*dhyānaśloka*) most commonly used to describe the anthropomorphic goddess Tripurā.

> [She] has, as it were, a white goad and is the Mother of the Universe. The desirous [She] binds, bound by the noose [of their own desires].
>
> [She] strikes down with a bow and five arrows [unwanted desire]. [She is clothed in] red, [She is] the Primordial Power and [has a] Universal View [of all beings' karma].[111]

The most common meditational verse describing Lalitā Tripurā appears in the ritual handbooks (*paddhati* or *nibandha*) of Śrīvidyā lineages:

> I contemplate the goddess who is red [in color or dress and] bears [in her four hands] the noose, the goad, the flower arrows and the bow [made of sugarcane], [She who] with [her] lustre envelops the [twelve accomplishments (*siddhis*)] beginning with the power to become minute (*anima*).[112]

The image evoked is that of the benign goddess who, in very different and discreet contexts, is understood in the roles of caring mother or devoted wife. Tripurā, for all her encompassing power and physical beauty, is a figure that instills feelings of security and stability rather than danger and enticement. Unlike the terrifying Kālī, who is sometimes pictured dancing on the corpse of her husband, Tripurā is a goddess whose inherent Śakti is under control. Submissive in her role as wife to Śiva, she is capable of righteous anger in her role as defensive and nurturing mother. Her mythological character rarely deviates from the picture of a less than perfectly ideal embodiment of conventional values. Lalitā Tripurasundarī is Queen of the Universe; she is a loving and stern mother to her children, and the beautiful and cooperative wife of her husband. In short, she is the archetypal *sumaṅgalī:* the wholly Dharmic embodiment of the feminine. Yet we should not see her as submissive or weak; rather, as the supreme Śakti, she is life-giving and capable of expressions of anger and power.

Tripurasundarī's common anthropomorphic (*sthūlarūpa*) image as the "Divine Queen of Kings" (*Rājarājeśvarī*) is given in the *Thousand Names of Lalitā.* She is depicted as seated on the lion's throne like a great queen

(vv. 2–3) having emerged from the altar of the fire of primordial consciousness (v. 4). Manifesting herself to fulfill the wishes of the gods (v. 5) and shining like a thousand suns (v. 6), she has four arms and holds in her hands the noose of desire (vv. 7–8), the elephant goad of wrath and worldly knowledge (v. 9), the sugarcane bow of the mind (v. 10) and the arrows of the five essences (*tanmātras*) (v. 11). She bathes the universe in her rosy complexion (v. 12), wearing flowers in her hair and a crown of jewels (vv. 13–14). She bears the auspicious mark of marriage and is modest in demeanor (vv. 16–25); her thin waist is burdened by her heavy breasts (vv. 36), and the Lord of Desire (i.e., Śiva) is drowned in the fullness of her smile (v. 28). She is dressed in red, adorned with a belt of jewelled bells and the crescent moon glimmering above her crown (vv. 29–51). (See frontispiece).

Bhāskararāya explains the appropriateness of the goddess's beneficent, motherly form in his comments on verse 13: "She is the Mother of the Universe because She is the One from whom everything is born."[113]

In verse 6 of the Upaniṣad a list of epithets further characterizes Tripurā and identifies her with the beneficent image of Lalitā. These epithets complete the image of her physical (*sthūla*) name and form and specify her relation to places of pilgrimage where Devī is worshipped.[114] We should note that Lalitā is essentially a "textual" goddess who is then further identified with local manifestations. Bhāskararāya's own chosen form of divinity (*iṣṭadevatā*) is Candrāmbā, although he is also aware of the many beneficent goddesses who populate the landscape of South India. For example, he makes explicit mention in *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya* of the consort of Śiva Naṭarāja at Cidambaram, Śivakāmasundarī. Contemporary Śrīvidyā adepts in South India are particularly focused on the images of Kāmākṣī of Kāñcipuram, who is the subject of discussion in the latter portions of the important *Lalitopākhyāna* and whose temple today includes a *śrīcakra* in the central shrine. Also important are Akhilandeśvarī of Trichy, who wears the *śrīcakra* as her earrings, and Mīnākṣī of Madurai whose popular figure often includes a *śrīcakra* placed at her feet. In short, any figure of the beneficent goddess can (and often is) identified with Lalitā Tripurasundarī or Rājarājeśvarī. Among Śrīvidyā intellectuals, however, the emphasis remains on Lalitā, and especially on the significance of her name, Tripurā.

Bhāskararāya's terse summary of the goddess's diverse physical forms allows him to move on to more "subtle" (*sūkṣma*) and esoteric images of Tripurā. For example, the significance of the name "Tripurā" is treated as a separate issue from her iconography, as are the types of meditation prescribed using her physical form.

The goddess's relationship with other forms of divinity is addressed throughout the tradition and arises at several points in *Tripurā Upaniṣad.* The Upaniṣad offers an excellent demonstration of the Śaiva-Śākta tradition's propensity to create a tiered divine hierarchy and to imagine relationships among the gods based on related identities of deities rather than on reified distinctions.[115] Yet as a sectarian Śākta tradition, Śrīvidyā asserts that the pantheon of gods with various images, names, and forms find its origin in Śakti:

> [She is called] *mattara* [in verse 1], [that is] supreme in all respects even among the known deities called Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. And [She is described further as one] who has that form of *mahima,* that is, the greatness of those deities. She alone is the primary cause (*nidānam*) of other deities' greatness, that is to say, [these deities] obtain greatness by worshipping (*upāsanāyām*) Her.[116]

Elsewhere in the Upaniṣad commentary, Bhāskararāya identifies the goddess with the famous *trimūrti* of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva by relating her to the masculine gods' consorts. In his explanation of the name "Ambikā"—a name most often associated with a beneficent physical image of the goddess—Bhāskararāya remarks, "She is the aggregate form of [the three consorts of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva and their respective powers (*śaktis*), namely] Vāmā, Jyeṣṭhā and Raudrī."[117]

It is again worth noting the relative unimportance of the goddess's physical femininity in these theological discussions. While the various kinds of intense devotion (*bhakti*) directed specifically to the mother goddess as the chosen deity (*iṣṭadevatā*) are likely never far from Bhāskararāya's mind, in this work he remains relatively disinterested in the value of devotion itself or in the idealized feminine qualities of the divinity. While god is undoubtedly "woman" for the Śākta Tantric philosopher, gender is a matter of theological principle rather than a turning towards a god-of-gender. Only in elaborate devotional rituals, not mentioned or suggested in the Upaniṣad, is gender significant to the tone and character of Bhāskararāya's theology. Certainly, Bhāskararāya has in mind the same goddess we see present in Tantric devotional contexts, such as in *Lalitāsahasranāma.* In the Upaniṣad commentary Bhāskararāya refrains from the discussion of Lalitā as loving and protective mother, as consort of Śiva, or in her more rare role as slayer of demons, primarily because devotion (*bhakti*) and these particular qualities of the goddess are not a topic of particular concern to the text. We might also suggest that he views *bhakti* merely as a prerequisite for higher forms of Tantric practice.[118]

Śakti's special consort relationship with Śiva is likewise addressed not to affirm a distinction between them but to see their complementary identities as an efficacious means of performing contemplative worship (*upāsana*). Śiva, who bears a variety of names and epithets in the Upaniṣad, including "Lord of Desire" (Kāmeśvara), "Intoxicator" (Mādana, also Erotic), and "Cause of Prosperity" (Śambhu), and Śakti are, in fact, not ultimately different.[119] While the "dynamic" Śakti is envisioned as seated on the lap of the "static" Śiva during meditation, this position, Bhāskararāya says, indicates "that Śiva is the base (*ādhāra*), [He] is the quality (*guṇa*) and Śakti is the substance (*pradhānam*)." Here Bhāskararāya reverses the usual theological formulation by giving Śakti the role of substance and Śiva the differentiating role of quality. Clearly, his intention is not to confuse established roles or to reformulate the standard theological explanation of the masculine and feminine deities. Rather, he appears to interchange theological roles in order to assert Śakti's preeminence. Elsewhere he suggests that the various iconographic relationships of Śiva and Śakti, including the half-Śiva half-Śakti form of *Ardhanārīśvara*, can be interpreted variously as fluid representations of basic cosmic facts.[120] In his remarks on verse 14, Bhāskararāya affirms complementary identity as the underlying principle for interpreting the various images of the Hindu gods as well as the more specific relationship of Śiva and Śakti:

> "Desire" (*kāma*) and "Lord" (*īśa*) refer to Kāmeśvara [Śiva, the "Lord of Desire"] who alone is the masculine form of the deity that is worshipped (*upāsyadevatā*). . . . Even though there are two givers (*datarau*) [that is, both Śiva and Śakti, discussed in the verse] the deity is only one; though it is twofold [in masculine and feminine aspects] when meditated upon as having qualities [for the purpose of] accomplishing the three aims [of human existence, viz., Dharma, material prosperity (*artha*) and pleasure (*kāma*)].[121]

Thus, the relationship between Śakti and other divinities, and especially Śiva, is both identity *and* distinction. Yet it is in her relationships with divinities other than Śiva that the tripartite goddess distinguishes herself. How Śakti's various theological relations are understood depends upon the perspective of the devotee and the purpose which a particular name and form is understood to manifest. For example, Śiva and Śakti's nuclear family of the elephant-headed Gaṇeśa and the warrior Skanda play important roles in Tantric ritual and cosmology. Adopting the characteristics made popular in the *Purāṇas*, Gaṇeśa as Lord of Attendants (*gaṇapati*) and Remover of Obstacles (*vigneśvara*) is—as he is in all popular Hindu traditions—the first deity worshiped. Skanda, on the other hand, is important in Śākta Tantric ritual sources primarily as a mantric force for dispensing evil and protecting against unwanted influences.[122] In short, Tantrics may call on any number of divinities, especially in their mantric manifestations, in order to bring about a desired effect. Śrīvidyā adepts in South India today, for example, are well known as teachers of the mantra "science" (*mantraśāstra*) and frequently initiate adepts into the worship of deities who are clearly ancillary and distinct from the Śrīvidyā tradition of Lalitā worship. The picture we draw of the Tantric, then, must be careful not to exclude the possibility of many different forms of worship within a sectarian tradition.

From Bhāskararāya's standpoint, the discussion of the goddess in any of her three types of forms (anthropomorphic or physical, mantric, and yantric), as well as her relationship with other images and deities, is precisely for the sake of creating a *sādhana* with specific worldly and spiritual implications. The goddess's appellations, epithets, physical forms and qualities, as well as her relationships, signify the Tantric's ostensible goals. Thus each name and form itself *is* a goal when correctly interpreted and conceived. The diversity of names and forms represents both the multivalency of the divine and the multiple goals of Tantric *sādhana*.

Like other Tantric authors writing in Sanskrit, Bhāskararāya goes to great lengths to elaborate the ways in which the various types of divine conceptualization can be understood: the goddess can be conceived ontologically and epistemologically as well as through her triadic imagery—physical, mantric or diagrammatic (i.e., as yantras)—and her relationship with other deities. All of these elements, he maintains, should be put to use in Tantric discipline.

Implicit in this elaboration is the idea that the divine has purposely assumed these names and forms, as well as the different ways in which it can be imagined for the sake of humanity. The divine triad of forms provides the adept with an iconographic map; it is set of anthropomorphic, verbal, and diagrammatic signs specifically devised to lead the adept to the divine center. At the same time, these forms are powerful manifestations of the divine in its most sublime essences. Within Śrīvidyā, for example, the imagery of Tripurā, the *śrīvidyā* mantra, and the *śrīcakra* are at once the highest manifestations of the triadic divinity and the adept's most accurate and detailed signposts on the path to worldly empowerment and final liberation.

While much of Bhāskararāya's commentary on *Tripurā Upaniṣad* is devoted to explicating the various forms of Tripurā, he refrains from commenting on popular mythological relationships. For example, he makes no mention of a relationship between Tripurā the goddess and the mythical city Tripurā, destroyed by Śiva.

In addition to theological explanations of Tripurā, the goddess's name and form are also interpreted with specific reference to their cosmological functions. Tripurā is said to be the very shape of the manifest universe as it originally unfolds in the form of the *śrīcakra*. The *śrīcakra,* he goes on to say, is essentially triadic. It is a representation of the emergence of the One into Three. The yantra is not only a representation of the universe as it has emerged from its divine source, it *is* the very macrocosmic form of the universe. On the microcosmic level, the *śrīcakra* is paralleled in the human form, which is also understood as triadic in all its essential aspects. The yantra's triangles, lines, and lotus petals are identified ritually with various parts of the physical body which, in turn, are correlated to mantras. Just as the goddess is macrocosmically a threefold physical (*sthūla*) subtle (*sūkṣma*), and transcendent (*parā*) form corresponding to her physical, mantric, and yantric manifestations, so microcosmically she is threefold as will, action, and knowledge.

Tripurā is also interpreted with reference to her soteriological functions. The goddess's physical, verbal, and transcendent images both embody the names and forms of creation and provide the map of the path leading back to primordial unity. One must create a *sādhana* which is, in substance as well as in form, identical to Tripurā herself.

We will consider in more detail each of the goddess's three images as they are interpreted in the Śrīvidyā school as we examine their cosmological and soteriological significance. Since the soteriological interpretation of Śakti is the relatively less complex of the two, we will deal with it first.

The traditional interpretation of Tripurā's name in Tantric soteriology involves a rather technical discussion of different levels of spiritual insight and worldly accomplishment, the fate of the individual soul (*ātman*) in the karmic process, and the concepts of external (*bahir-*) and internal sacrifice (*antaryāga*). We should note that Bhāskararāya does not discuss the salvific power of reciting the goddess's name except in mantric forms. In other words, there is no name-theology in the Śrīvidyā school comparable to the devotional name-mysticism of the north Indian Sants or the southern Tamil Āḻvārs.[123] The Śrīvidyā adept does not obtain liberation or worldly prosperity through acts of intense devotion or by contemplation of the Name of God. While other Tantric-influenced writers, such as the Maratha Sant Nāmdev or the well-known Hindi poet Kabīr, maintain that this type of devotion is crucial to salvation and accessible to anyone who has true faith (*bhakti*), the Śrīvidyā adept uses the goddess's name as a symbol, a mantra, or a living embodiment of the ultimate truth. Śākta Tantric *sādhana* in general concentrates on mantric names, either in the form of a recital of the "diffuse" mantra embodied in the thousand names of Lalitā (i.e., *Lalitāsahasranāma*) or in the silent repetition of the "condensed" name of the goddess, that is, the *śrīvidyā* mantra. Thus the mantric names of the goddess are themselves considered increasingly more subtle and powerful emanations of the goddess. In contemporary Śrīvidyā the various extrapolations of the goddess's names provide a method of ranking them as mantras. The lowest form of mantra is the thousand names of Lalitā, which is followed by the more condensed three hundred names (i.e., *Lalitātriśatī*). These mantras are then more concentrated in the juvenile goddess Bālātripurasundarī's mantra, a variant on the *śrīvidyā,* which usually precedes initiation into either the fifteen or sixteen syllable form of *śrīvidyā* of Lalitā Tripurasundarī. Controversy surrounds the actual forms of the *śrīvidyā,* a topic that will require some further discussion. The point to emphasize here is that each form of mantra has a particular level of power associated with it and a particular context in which it should be used. While devotion (*bhakti*) to the name may be an appropriate requisite for ritual devotion, it is nonetheless ancillary to other types of *sādhana*.

Tantrics speak of five levels of liberation which, according to Bhāskararāya, are obtained when devotion is coupled with an initiated knowledge of the most subtle forms of the divine. In Śrīvidyā, liberation begins when the adept has learned the proper use of the *śrīvidyā* mantra in ritual combination with the *śrīcakra.* Bhāskararāya's discussion of liberation is linked to his understanding of the meaning of the goddess's name "Tripurā," the "Three Cities." He summarizes his views in remarks on verse 1:

> There are five types of liberation: [1] being in the same world (*sālokya*) is one; [2–4] proximity (*sāmīpya*), similarity in form (*sārūpya*) and union (*sāyujya*) [though] three [are taken as

> a single unit] and [5] identity (*kaivalya*). . . . Among these [five] the first and the last are one path (*mārga*) and the middle group of three are another path. . . .
>
> Because there are three paths the cities (*pura*) . . . are understood to be three. Because [She] pervades the three cities, fills [them] and is in the form of them, the Supreme Deity is called Tripurā. . . . This fivefold division [of liberation] into three [paths] explains the attainment of the goddess. Therefore She alone is [the One, the Absolute Brahman,] called the three cities (*tripurā*).[124]

Just as liberation is understood by the metaphorical interpretation of the goddess's name to be three levels of attainment, so ritual actions and the stages of the path that make up contemplative worship (*upāsana*) are interpreted as threefold. The first two types of liberation (*sālokya* and the three that form group two, *sāmīpya, sārūpya,* and *sāyujya*) involve a less than perfect realization of the adept's nondualistic identity with divinity. One is not liberated from the cycles of birth and death (*saṃsāra*), but from any birth in which the adept could suffer a regression. Only in the final stage of identity (*kaivalya*) with Brahman does one obtain perfect freedom while yet living (*jīvanmukti*).

Bhāskararāya places the accomplishment of final liberation in a proximate relation to worldly pleasures in his remarks on the importance of imbibing ritual offerings. He interprets verse 7 metaphorically to make his point about soteriology:

> "Dwelling on the outskirts of heaven" indicates achieving the fruits of the three human aims [in life, namely, Dharma, material prosperity (*artha*) and pleasure (*kāma*)]. Tripurā's supreme abode [called in verse 7 *traipura*] actually indicates liberation (*mokṣa*) itself. The sense is that [*upāsakas*] obtain liberation as well as all [worldly] desires.[125]

Like other Tantrics, Bhāskararāya affirms that the achievement of spiritual bliss (*ānanda*) in the final state of liberation is not antithetical to the pursuit of worldly enjoyments (*bhukti*) and sensual pleasure.[126] Unlike many contemporary Śrīvidyā adepts, Bhāskararāya does not shrink from the common Tantric belief that the adept, as a result of *sādhana*'s accomplishments, may work his or her will in any fashion—including in sensual affairs. He states plainly that as the adept becomes more like Śiva, he becomes irresistible to the opposite sex.[127] We also observe here elements of the Tantric tradition's misogyny. Tantric is *sādhana* designed by males and meant primarily for males to practice, despite the avowed disdain for a gender bias in determining the potential adept's qualification (*adhikāra*). He quotes the popular *Saundaryalaharī* attributed to Śaṅkara to make his point about the erotic power of the adept: "Whoever meditates, O Queen of Hara, on your *kalā* [i.e., mantric seedsyllable] of Manmatha [i.e., Śiva] suddenly leads women to confusion, how much less is [the cosmic woman called] the Three Worlds (*trilokīṃ*) confused, [She] who has the sun and the moon as her breasts."[128]

The relationship between various forms of worldly empowerment and the more abstract discussion of soteriological goals leads us back to Tripurā's different images and their cosmological significance. Tripurā's name and physical, anthropomorphic form (*sthūlarūpa*), are complemented by her subtle (*sūkṣma*) mantra, the *śrīvidyā,* and her transcendent (*parā*) yantra, the *śrīcakra*. Following Bhāskararāya's lead in the *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya* we will consider the significance of the *śrīcakra* and the *śrīvidyā* respectively by treating them as Śrīvidyā's distinctive contribution to Tantric contemplative worship (*upāsana*).

Śrīvidyā and Tantric Practice: Efficacy and Realization

The *śrīcakra* may well be the most famous visual element in all of Hindu Tantrism.[129] Its symbolic interpretation and ritual worship are the special province of the Śrīvidyā school and, along with the *śrīvidyā* mantra, the most discussed topic in Śrīvidyā texts. From the analytical point of view, the *śrīcakra* and *śrīvidyā* are crucial elements in the internal polythetic classification of Śrīvidyā as a distinct form of Śākta Tantrism. To the Śrīvidyā adept, the *śrīcakra* is the universe's transcendent (*parā*) configuration; the material universe is actually a *śrīcakra*. Perhaps the definitive statement on the *śrīcakra*'s identity with Śakti as the manifest universe appears in the *Yoginīhṛdaya:* "When She, the Supreme Śakti, out of her own will [assumes] the form of the Universe, observing her own self-effusion (*sphurattama*), the [*śrī-*] *cakra* emerges."[130]

Precisely how Śakti's self-effusion and expansion (*prapañca*) as *śrīcakra* occurs and how this event can be ritually reenacted are Bhāskararāya's primary topics in the *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya*. To understand the cosmological event of expansion (*prapañca*) is, for the adept, to participate in it and to develop a method for identifying with this transcendent form of Śakti.

Unlike the *śrīvidyā,* which has descended in various forms according to different basic lineage traditions, the *śrīcakra,* as we see from the *Yoginīhṛdaya* description, is understood to be the "original" cosmic form in which the universe has come forth. Its variations are not considered significant and, unlike with the *śrīvidyā,* Bhāskararāya does not view the *śrīcakra*'s variations as representing different qualifications (*adhikāra*) for Tantric practice. Bhāskararāya's description of the *śrīcakra* in *Tripurā Upaniṣad* can confuse even the most skilled Śrīvidyā adept. We shall first consider the configuration's catholic symbolism as it is represented in other Tantric sources and then proceed further into his interpretation.

Figure A in the Appendix presents the *śrīcakra* or *śrīyantra* in its most common or "Kaula tradition" form, distinguished from the inverted figure proposed by Lakṣmīdhara (figure A1). A cursory inspection shows us that the yantra is composed of nine large or major intersecting triangles in the center of which is a "drop" or *bindu;* these interlacing triangles are surrounded by two sets of lotus petals (one of eight petals and one of sixteen) around which are three lines forming a rectangular set of gateways. According to the Kaulas, the yantra is usually pictured with the five major triangles facing downward and the outermost gateways "open" rather than enclosed.[131] (Bhāskararāya, however, maintains that the gateways should be "closed" rather than open.) The five major downward-facing triangles represent Śakti and the four upward-facing triangles represent Śiva.[132] Their combination suggests the divine couple's conjugal union. The nine major triangles are not, however, the principle focus of attention for interpreters. Rather, the *śrīcakra* is more frequently interpreted "from inside out," i.e., following the so-called "creation method" or *sṛṣṭi krama* that parallels the process of creation. This interpretive method shifts the focus of the analysis to the sets of minor triangles that result from the intersection of the nine large, major triangles. Bhāskararāya's discussion, for example, treats the *sādhana* involving *śrīcakra* as an ascending path. The adept circumambulates the yantra, moving towards the peak, from which she or he views the whole universe in its myriad names and forms. In its full three-dimensional form, the *srīcakra* is often referred to as an the *meru cakra* or simply as *Sumeru,* named after the mythical city at the center of the universe. In yet another variation the *śrīcakra* takes a more flattened or elongated three-dimensional form called the *kailāsa cakra*. These two forms of the *cakra* complement its common two-dimensional or *bhūprastāra* form (lit., "spreading over the earth").

The *śrīcakra*'s minor triangles formed by the intersection of the five and four major triangles are treated as units, themselves called *cakra*s or "wheels." The *cakra*s are then identified as sets as belonging specifically either to Śiva or Śakti.[133] However, it is also the case that each *cakra* is presided over by an aspect of Lalitā and that each individual triangle or "spoke" within a given *cakra* "wheel" is separately named and identified as an aspect (actually, a female yogi [*yoginī*]) who is but a form of the goddess. The two sets of sixteen and eight lotus petals, as well as the three lines forming the outermost gateways are likewise called *cakra*s and complete the essential elements in the *yantra*'s symbolism. Thus, the total number of internal *cakra*s within the *śrīcakra* is nine, corresponding to the number of major triangles. The internal *cakra*s begin with the small central triangle (*trikoṇa*), this is followed by eight minor triangles (*vasukoṇa*), two sets of ten minor triangles, then the fourteen minor triangles (*manvaśra*) followed by the two sets of lotus petals surrounded by the outermost rectangular gateways (*bhūpura* or *bhūgṛha*). (See figures B through J in Appendix.)

The three lines forming circles surrounding the lotus petals, however, are at the center of an interpretive controversy.[134] While they are not significant for most interpretations, they are usually included in the *śrīcakra*'s configuration. Bhāskararāya offers no explanation of the traditions that have included the three "superfluous" circles surrounding the *śrīcakra*'s lotus-petals. He rejects their presence on the grounds that they serve no practical, ritual purpose. We might say that Bhāskararāya is rigorously Tantric on this point: form must follow function. Since the *śrīcakra* is the transcendent manifestation of Śiva and Śakti, it must be utterly intelligible. He rejects the notion that any aspect of it can or should be left unexplained: as the very form (*svarūpa*) of the universe nothing in it is left to chance or deemed inscrutable. While we should not exaggerate the significance of this particular issue, the point is that Tantrics consider their formulations to be quasi-scientific. Their images present a perfectly rational universe and offer a thorough rendering of reality's transcendent form, which is then coupled with the most effective method of obtaining knowledge about it. In addition to the "visible" points of reference on the *śrīcakra,* the Śrīvidyā adept identifies other esoteric places in which various aspects of ritual worship are to be performed. For example, in an imaginary square around the innermost triangle the goddess's four weapons (bow, arrows, goad, and noose) are worshiped while in the rectangle above the central triangle is placed the *tripuṭa* or three horizontal lines in honor of one's three immediate gurus.[135]

We should note that *śrīcakra* interpretations focus not on the nine large triangles but rather on their interrelationships. Put theologically, the Śrīvidyā school's attentions are not on the fact that Śakti and Śiva have joined (as the intersection of the five plus four major triangles symbolizes) but more precisely on where and how they interact. Thus, each of the internal *cakras* has its own deity who presides over the *yoginīs* of the triangles over which the "great" Lalitā (Mahā) tripurasundarī rules. The deities who preside over both *cakras* and minor triangles (or lotuses or lines) are themselves devolving forms of the Tripurā's manifestation, each an aspect of the Supreme Śakti. Some of the deities represent her various powers (*siddhi*), others such things as the fifteen phases of the moon and the *mudrās* or ritual gestures. In short, every important cosmological fact or ritual formulation that can influence the inner workings of the universe has a place on the *śrīcakra* as an aspect of Tripurā. To worship or meditate upon the *cakra* is not only to identify one's innermost soul with the divine Tripurā, it is to participate in all her powers and activities, including the primary functions of the creation and dissolution of the universe.

While the *śrīcakra* is in actuality the confluence of Śakti and Śiva, a representation of the conjugal union that created the universe, Śakti alone is the presiding deity. "She in Her peaceful aspect is the deity of [the central point known as the] *bindu cakra* established in the [center of the] *śrīcakra*."[136] Bhāskararāya observes that the *baindava cakra*—the *bindu* at the *śrīcakra*'s center—is the source of all eight expanding *cakras* since Śakti was originally a single, unified being identical to Brahman. This fact, he says, is a matter of spiritual insight known only to Śrīvidyā adepts. The *bindu* is worshipped externally only in rituals that involve the entire *śrīcakra;* separately, its significance is a matter of internal contemplation. His remarks in *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya* again tie the meaning of *śrīcakra* to its worship:

> the eight *cakras* beginning with [the outermost] *bhūpura* [forming the three-lined rectangular gateway of the *śrīcakra*] and ending with the *trikoṇa* [the innermost minor triangle] is a sheath surrounding the [central point or] *bindu* with its three forms [that is, the *bindu* as expanded into the *trikoṇa*]. In this [*bindu*] the Great Being is present [though not visible by virtue of the surrounding sheath] . . . [but] it is ineligible . . . for external worship (*bahirpūjā*) [though not for the internal worship (*antaryāga*) or *upāsana*]. Only the knowers of Brahman know that [the *bindu*] is identical with the supreme goddess and only within themselves. Others do not [know this].[137]

At the end of this remark Bhāskararāya makes the crucial macrocosmic/microcosmic connection between the *śrīcakra* and the Tantric Śrīvidyā adept: the individual's true self-identity (*ātman*) is found at the center of the *śrīcakra,* which is itself an expansion (*prapañca*) not only of the universe's basic principles and elements but of the human body and consciousness.[138] In order to "dissolve" false distinctions that arise from human ignorance (*avidyā*), the adept is enjoined to practice a yoga or discipline of "dissolution" (*laya-yoga*) effected through outward and inward forms of ritual and mental concentration.[139]

The process of ritual worship and contemplation, which includes the practice of *kuṇḍalinī* yoga and such related disciplines as breath control (*prānayama*), Bhāskararāya terms *upāsana,* literally, "being situated nearby" or "engaging." *Upāsana,* it seems, differs from *sādhana* only to the extent that it refers specifically to the practice of different types of external and internal worship. *Sādhana,* on the other hand, is a more general and a more encompassing term for the Tantric way of life. It refers not only to ritual practices but all aspects of Tantric discipline, including study, teaching, and nearly any other activity enjoined on the adept.

It is specifically through *upāsana* that the Śrīvidyā adept comes to know the divine as situated within the body, speech, and mind; *upāsana* is an engagement with the goddess, a participation in her subtle (*sūkṣma*) mantric form and an identification with her transcendent (*parā*) yantric manifestations. It is a type of *sādhana* for which the non-Tantric is deemed unqualified. In the Śrīvidyā tradition, the essence of this engagement involves identifying physical and mental aspects of the human personality with the nine *cakras* of the *śrīcakra.* Just as the *śrīcakra* expands from its single source, the *bindu,* into intersecting triads—each a less subtle manifestation of the previous one and represented by the eight minor *cakras*—so the triad of human body, speech, and mind mirror the macrocosmic fact as an expansion and emanation of the unified Self (*ātman*). Following a pattern for describing the essential elements (*tattvas*) of the material universe established first in the Sāṅkhya and Yoga systems, Tantrics expand on the model (and bring the total to 36 as opposed to 24 and 25, respectively, for Sāṅkhya and Yoga). These essential "units of reality" (*tattva*) are then systematically identified with various aspects of the *śrīvidyā* and the *śrīcakra.* The adept's task is to identify his or her body with a *śrīcakra* and to identify this microcosm of the universe as it is found in the human body and personality with its fully expanded, macrocosmic form. By ritually ascending from the *śrīcakra*'s outermost precincts, upward towards its peak, the adept systematically identifies (or "lays down" [*nyāsa*]) the physical, verbal, and mental aspects of his or her being with the macrocosmic divine reality.

As contemplative worship (*upāsana*) dissolves false distinctions and the adept's latent spiritual-nature *kuṇḍalinī* ascends within the body, so the Śrīvidyā adept ritually ascends the *śrīcakra*. Beginning at the outside of the *śrīcakra,* the adept traces the process of creation in reverse. He proceeds not from the "inside out" (i.e., beginning, as in creation, at the *bindu*) but from the "outside in" (i.e., from points on the periphery towards the *bindu*). Ritually reversing creation, rather than simply reenacting it, the adept eventually comes to see creation from the vantage point of its creator. As we have noted, the visual image is one of ascending the sacred peak of Mount Sumeru, from which one gains a tactical vantage point from which to proceed back into the world.

Like the *maṇḍala* of Borobodur or the grounds of Ankhor Wat, the *śrīcakra* is designed as a contemplative instrument by which the adept rises in nine ascending levels, representing the nine stages of divine self-effusion. Bhāskararāya rather cryptically says as much in his remarks on verse 2:

> the conventional method of expressing the expansion (*prapañca*) [of the *śrīcakra* described as] beginning with the *bindu cakra* [is that the *śrīcakra* is] not distinct from space, etc., [ultimately, nor is it] below [the level] of Brahman. Based on this [view of the expanding *bindu cakra*] is the extended [three-dimensional figure called] the *Meru* [*śrīcakra*]. Therefore this one [*Meru śrī-*] cakra, beginning with [the outermost cakra, the rectangular gateways of the] *bhūpura* and ending with the *bindu* are nine levels (*bhūmikā*), one above the other.[140]

While Bhāskararāya does not outline the specifics of the ritual method he prefers for engaging the *śrīcakra*—this he leaves to the *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra*—he does assert that contemplative worship (*upāsana*) can, under certain circumstances, focus entirely on the *bindu* and the *śrīcakra*'s innermost structure.

> The essence of the matter is that the whole *śrīcakra* in its subtle form is indeed present from [the perspective of] the "dissolution cakra" [i.e., looking at the *śrīcakra* from "outside in"] when the threefold form of the cakra consists of the [central] *bindu,* the

> [innermost minor triangle called the] *trikoṇa* and the [inner eight minor triangles constituting] the *vasukoṇa* cakra. An injunction in the Tantras states that in an emergency (*āpatkālika*) the summarized forms of the [*śrīcakra*] ritual (*pūjā*) may begin with the *vasukoṇa* [of eight minor triangles and proceed up] to the *bindu* [at its center]. This [Upaniṣad] is the scriptural authority (*śruti*) for that [method of ritual worship].[141]

Verse 3 describes the expansion of the universe in the form of the *śrīcakra* and affirms the ritual identification between the yantra and the adept. The Upaniṣad encapsulates Śrīvidyā discipline (*sādhana*) as a macrocosmic/microcosmic identification in verse 3, he says:

> Originally She was one, She became nine [as the *trikoṇa* and *vasukoṇa*]. Then [She became] forty-three [i.e., the total number of minor triangles formed by the intersection of the nine major triangles]. . . . Let the Mothers [or forms of Śakti identified with the forty-three deities (*yoginī*s, literally, female yogis) placed ritually on the *śrīcakra*'s forty-three triangles] enter into me.[142]

Bhāskararāya further relates his interests in the practical disciplines of contemplative worship (*upāsana*) to cosmological descriptions of the *śrīcakra*. For example, he identifies the expanding form of the *śrīcakra* with the ritual gestures or *mudrā*s considered as manifestations (rather than mere symbolic representations) of the subdeities that preside over the nine cakras. As the adept shows the *mudrā*s during the ritual worship of the *śrīcakra,* he or she summons the deities from within, identifies with them, and thereby gradually transforms his or her body, speech, and mind into these deities by "laying them down" (*nyāsa*). The overall aim is to treat each ritual gesture (*mudrā*) as part of the gradual process by which the ordinary personality becomes identified with the supreme Śakti. *Mudrā*s, like mantras, serve to purify and protect the adept on the dangerous path to spiritual ascendancy. Tantric ritual handbooks usually include only the prescriptions for using the elements of *upāsana,* such as the *mudrā*s, while interpretation is left to traditional textual commentators and to the oral instruction of living gurus.

Within Śrīvidyā these complex ritual instructions and speculative interpretations are fully discussed only in oral instructions. These oral interpretations usually involve an exegesis of a written text and commentary.

Tripurā Upaniṣad offers just such an example of how Tantric ritual prescriptions are explained symbolically and ritually. For example, Bhāskararāya mentions breifly the significance of the nine *mudrās* and gives a clear example of how Tantrics interpret the particular elements of *sādhana* beyond their ritual use: "The meaning is [that these] nine [*mudrās* indicate respectively] merit, sin, the Self (*ātman*), the inner Self (*antarātman*), the Supreme Self (*paramātman*), the Knowledge Self (*jñānātman*), the measurer (*pramāta*), the measured (*prameya*) and the measure (*prāmā*)."[143]

Ānanda: Tantric Sādhana and Tantric Goals

Contemplative worship (*upāsana*) is augmented by wine-drinking (verse 7), usually presented at the time of ritual offerings (*upācāra*) and strictly governed by the Tantric's rules of initiation (*dīkṣā*). Any nonsanctioned use of intoxicants, Bhāskararāya warns, can result in disaster. As he observes:

> The form of Brahman is bliss and that is established in the body. The [ritual] substances which manifest that [bliss] are drunk by the Yogis. . . . However if the substances when not ritually used [and so considered] impure (*apavitram*) are drunk then because they actively obstruct the aims of human life, they bind one to sin [and] are not capable of inducing that [blissful] state.[144]

Bhāskararāya insists that the use of wine, as well as the other *pañcamakāra* (meat, fish, fermented grain, and sexual intercourse), are necessary components in the highest forms of spiritual discipline (*sādhana*). It is in this way he clearly displays his so-called left-handed (*vāmācāra*) or Kaula Tantric colors.[145] In the event one of the *pañcamakāra* is not available, he says, ritual substitutes (*pratinidhi*) may be made for any except sexual intercourse.[146] Yet this is not the preferred method: a qualified adept must use all available means to advance his *sādhana* even if certain elements cross the lines of conventional public morality. Intoxicants, he goes on to say, have a specific purpose: they are regulated elements of the internal sacrifice (*antaryāga*) used to induce "conceptionlessness in which the only object is one's Self."[147] He likens the temporary physiological effects of the *pañcamakāra* and the pleasure of other erotic types of meditation to a permanent condition gradually attained over an extended period of time through *sādhana*. The analogy he uses to make his point is what we might call "getting your sea-legs." He says:

> And one should not say that [the *pañcamakāras*'] aim was not obtained [simply] because of the temporariness of the stage [reached by use of] substances [such as wine, etc.] The same applies to meditative concentration (*samādhi*). . . . by methods such as controlling the breath one enters into meditative concentration (*samādhi*) again and again by the proficiency gained over a period of time; after some time even without breath control one obtains permanent meditative concentration. So it is said that those who board a boat on the ocean feel a swaying back and forth due to [the motion of] the waves and when they alight from the boat the feeling of swaying continues; likewise in the present contexts, by proficiency gained [when attaining the] detached (*unmanī*) and stateless (*anavastha*) [stages] by drinking purified substances [such as ritually consecrated wine, then], even without the substances, after a few days a similar state not induced is accomplished.[148]

Bhāskararāya not only elaborates on the conditions under which the *pañcamakāra* may be used, he also makes a point of explaining them in the technical terms of Vedic ritualists (*mīmāṃsakas*). Thus, he attempts to justify their use implicitly by resorting to "orthodox" explanations—a concern that is expressed in equally oblique ways by many contemporary Śrīvidyā adepts identifying with both Kaula Tantrism and conventional brahmanism. Yet justification does not appear to be Bhāskararāya's primary concern. As a Kaula Tantric he may be simply affirming the *pañcamakāra* as appropriate measures within the restricted purview of initiated Tantric *sādhana*.

Bhāskararāya is not interested in engaging in Tantric apologetics—as are many contemporary adepts—but rather in describing the Upaniṣad as a work of Vedic *śruti* that also happens to be Tantric. He distinguishes the Tantric from the Vedic primarily by establishing different notions of qualification for practices involving rituals. The situation becomes a serious matter of interpretation when there occur double or parallel rites, that is, when there are seemingly redundant Vedic and Tantric rites. For example, the obligatory (*nitya*) Vedic prayers prescribed for twice-born males at the daily junctures (*sandhyāvandana*) are imitated by a slightly different Tantric version of the same ritual.[149]

Why were two sets of rites created? While the historical origins of these double rites are complex, we see in them ways by which Tantrics distinguish themselves from non-Tantric Hindus. First, Tantrics redefine the qualifications for practice by deliberately going beyond the restrictions of conventional Vedic texts. However, every Tantric will not qualify for the necessary obligatory (*nitya*) and occasional (*naimittika*) Vedic rites. This does not exempt the Tantric from certain common Hindu ritual responsibilities. Parallel Tantric rites fulfill these obligations and yet preserve the Vedic/Tantric distinction. Without Tantric versions of these rites, the adept not qualified for Vedic rites by birth or gender fails to meet important Hindu obligations, since ritual, for the Hindu, is a means of defining and binding together the moral and religious community. In other words, ritual acts are part of a Hindu's Dharma and part of the traditions that are thought to originate in the Veda. Second, the Tantric versions of these rituals signify a further, special qualification. Since not every Vaidika will be entitled to perform the Tantric rite unless duly initiated, the Tantric's seemingly redundant ritual can, on certain occasions, further establish his religious superiority. While the Tantric rite sets the Tantric apart, only under certain conditions does it establish a notion of superiority over the Veda. When rites, for example, duplicate certain commonly acknowledged obligations (*nitya*) the Vedic/Tantric distinction does not reinforce the superiority of one over the other but rather reestablishes a double norm. In these instances qualifications for Tantric or Vedic rites merely differ. However, since these Vedic-like rites are designed to imitate Vedic prescriptions, Tantrics may have devised them to enhance the stature and establish the ritual purity of non-twice-born adepts.

The double norm, to which Bhāskararāya and the strongly Vaidika Tantrics adhere, situates Tantrism within the established norms and expectations of Hindu tradition. At the same time, it establishes the Tantric way as wholly separate and, with regard to crucial matters such as the attainment of liberation, superior to the exoteric Vaidika tradition. While Vedic rites are usually considered the privilege of the twice-born, the Tantric Vaidika inverts their status. Vedic rites are now relatively inferior since the basis for Tantric qualification is merit rather than "mere" birthright. While Tantrics would not deny that the twice-born appear to have advantages on the basis of birth, they reject these as ultimately trivial, especially when compared to Tantric forms of *sādhana* that deal with liberation and worldly empowerment. Birth in a privileged caste, unlike Tantric initiation, will not suffice to guarantee spiritual progress or assure one's destiny in the karmic cycle.

Further, ritual obligations incumbent on all Hindus do not simply disappear after Tantric initiation. Most Vaidika Tantrics, including Bhāskararāya, interpret the double norm to mean that both Vedic and Tantric rites should be performed by twice-born (*dvija*) male Tantrics. As Rāmeśvara Sūri remarks, the Vedic rites should take precedence when they are obligatory (*nitya*), not because they are superior but because they are part of one's public socioreligious obligation.[150] Once the obligation is completed, the Vaidika Tantric must perform the private Tantric rite for which he or she is specially qualified. Bhāskararāya adds that this dual prescription applies only to obligatory (*nitya*) and occasional (*naimittika*) rituals. The Tantric should abstain completely from any rites performed for personal gain (*kāmya karma*). These self-serving rituals, which are different from the *sādhana* that leads one to individual salvation, only entangle the Tantric in unwanted karmic consequences.

In contemporary Śrīvidyā in South India, when Vedic and Tantric rites overlap it is more common among high-caste adepts to allow the Vedic rite to supplant the Tantric version. As one adept explains,

> As a Vaidika I should remain true to my heritage and keep up appearances so as not to confuse others. So when both [Tantric and Vedic] rites are obligatory [or occasional], I do only the Vedic [ones]. We are talking only of mere obligations and these should not be unnecessarily repeated. Tantric *sādhana* is for liberation [primarily] and other accomplishments (*siddhi*) are simply secondary effects.[151]

The adept's point is especially telling in light of our effort to distinguish Tantrism from other types of Hinduism. He maintains that the Hindu life entails specified worldly obligations to which one must respond ritually, depending of course on station (*āśrama*) and birth (*varṇa* and gender). If one is a twice-born male, he says, certain types of Vedic obligation obtain while redundant Tantric obligations are subsumed. If, however, one is not a twice-born male and a Tantric, then Tantric obligations remain incumbent on the adept. We can conclude, then, that to be "Hindu," at least in the eyes of these Tantrics, one must fulfill certain ritual obligations—acts with social and religious implications—that pertain especially to the accomplishment of life's worldly aims (*puruṣārtha*). Tantric *sādhana,* unlike Vedic practices, the adept implies, guarantees the fourth human objective, liberation. However, contemporary adepts will not likely make the claim that liberation—at least at some "lower" stage—is unattainable without Tantric rites. The Tantric method, they insist, offers the advantages of expediency and suitability in an age when birthright and gender are no longer primary criteria for *sādhana.*

Tantrism, therefore, not only creates a parallel tradition that continues to meet the expectations of an ideal Hindu society, it redefines the sacred by differentiating types of action and the qualifications for ritual participants. It is on these two grounds it asserts its claim to superiority. While many Tantrics say that Tantric *sādhana* is merely the best alternative, considering the degenerate circumstances of the Kali age, there is no doubt this claim is made together with the other, more threatening claim of theological superiority.

Viewed critically, the Tantric acquires status and an identity within a religiously ordered society, not because he is privileged to perform certain powerful rituals by virtue of a special initiation; Tantric religious superiority is purely a matter of discussion within theological traditions. Rather, the Tantric's claim to superiority depends upon obtaining recognition within the Hindu community. So long as Tantrics engender responses from those outside Tantrism but inside Hinduism, their identity as Hindus is secure—as is their own sense of religious superiority. That non-Tantrics admonish them only reinforces their distinct identity and their sense of religious privilege. Social recognition need not be favorable. Disdain for Tantrism, expressed by other Hindus, functions comparably to an admission of its superiority: both views set Tantrics apart from non-Tantrics. At the core of this distinction are non-Tantric rejections of ideas and practices that are perceived to advocate socially antinomian (or adharmic) forms of behavior. In addition to practices involving the *pañcamakāra*, Śākta Tantrics also advocate the erotic *kāmakalādhyāna*—a topic addressed in verse 11 of the Upaniṣad.

In its literal, external (*bahiryāga*) forms, *kāmakalādhyāna* involves the worship of a naked woman, sometimes a virgin, who represents the goddess.[152] It may or may not culminate in sexual intercourse, the physical pleasure of which is comparable to divine bliss (*ānanda*). Within *Tripurā Upaniṣad*, *kāmakalādhyāna* is treated as part of the Śrīvidyā school's *śrīcakra* worship. Bhāskararāya's sectarian Śrīvidyā interpretation of *kāmakalā* meditation defines it as part of identification of the human body with the *śrīcakra*. In this way one brings about realization by transforming the base and sensual into the divine.[153]

Despite advocating *kāmakalādhyāna* and the use of *pañcamakāra*, practices he must have known were controversial, Bhāskararāya carefully distances himself and his Kaula-oriented Śrīvidyā from the excesses of other Tantrics. Kaula practices, he reiterates, must be both strictly regulated by the guru and interpreted in terms consistent with Vedic ritual injunctions. While Bhāskararāya's interpretations may place Śrīvidyā as a whole on the puritanical side of the Tantric spectrum, its Kaula Tantric elements would still offend a majority of non-Tantric Vaidikas, especially high-caste brahmans. Throughout his work, however, Bhāskararāya avoids confrontation. He simply stands his ground in the belief that Kaula Tantric views and practices are congenial with the Vedic traditions, and indeed are their highest expression. The result is twofold. First, he places Śrīvidyā squarely within those Tantric factions that attempt to harmonize themselves with Vedic traditions. And, second, he asserts implicitly the superiority of the Kaula-oriented Śrīvidyā over all other forms of Tantric or Vedic *sādhana*.

The *śrīvidyā:* Mantra as Power

Śrīvidyā's cosmological imagery is completed by introducing the goddess's root-mantra (*mūlamantra*), the *śrīvidyā*. The *śrīvidyā* is referred to more commonly by its forms; it is called the "fifteen" or "sixteen" syllables (*pañcadaśī* or *ṣoḍaśī*). This subtle form (*sūkṣmarūpa*) of the goddess, when incorporated into the ritual worship of the *śrīcakra,* merges Śrīvidyā's speculative cosmology with its ritual discipline. Using the Upaniṣad's technical vocabulary, Bhāskararāya identifies the mantra with the gradually expanding names and forms identified with the parts of the *śrīcakra*. Thus, Brahman-as-sound is interpreted both in terms of the parts of the *śrīcakra* and in the elements that make up the *śrīvidyā*. He says:

> That [initial] modification [of the One into many] is [technically] called *śānta* [literally, "peaceful"] because it is the aggregate form of desire, knowledge, and action. [*Śānta* insofar as She is Brahman] is called transcendent (*parā*) because it is the aggregate form of [the four emanations of evolving primordial sound (*śabda*) technically called *paśyantī, madhyamā* and *vaikharī*].[154]

From the outset of the text, the goddess Tripurā is identified as sound not only at the mantric level but also at the mundane level. She is present at the verbal level of everyday speech in the form of the vowels and consonants of Sanskrit.[155] Bhāskararāya summarizes this aspect of the goddess by saying, "As the banyan tree is found in its seed, so these [syllables of Sanskrit] contain everything and are complete."[156] His point is that from the prearticulate *śabdabrahman* emerges the sublime form of the *śrīvidyā* and other "lesser" mantras. From these mantras come, at the next, more mundane, stages of development, the sounds of the privileged language of Sanskrit that presumably forms the basis for other languages.

For Bhāskararāya, as for other Tantrics, the idea is that divinity's manifestations are hierarchical and ubiquitous. The *śrīvidyā* mantra, he points out, is not mere mundane speech (*vaikharī*) but a deeply secret (*atirahasya*), subtle manifestation of the goddess. When heard at the human level it is subtle rather than ordinary language and more physically manifest than the prearticulate, "seen-but-not-heard" (technically, *paśyantī*) *śabdabrahman*. The Upaniṣad, he asserts, conceals the *śrīvidyā*'s forms in a technical or secret vocabulary that the guru reveals.[157]

Bhāskararāya discusses only briefly the interpretation of mantras in *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya*—a matter he takes up in rich detail in his *Varivasyārahasya*. He does, however, make his essential points on mantra theory within sectarian Śrīvidyā:

1. The *śrīvidyā* is Śakti and thus the highest of all mantras and is concealed, in various ways, within the Vedas. As a manifestation of divine consciousness (*cit*) it is called a *vidyā* (literally, "knowledge" or a "science") because the term is feminine in gender.

2. The *śrīvidyā* is identical to the famous Vedic *gāyatrī* (i.e., *Ṛg Veda,* 3.62.10) though it is "more secret" than the *gāyatrī*. Like the Vedic mantra, it is restricted in terms of who may learn it, though qualification for initiation is not a matter of gender and birth as it is for the *gāyatrī*. Rather, Tantric mantras, such as the *śrīvidyā,* are taught following the more exacting qualifications of Tantric discipline.

3. The *śrīvidyā*'s silent repetition (*japa*) in the context of internal contemplative worship (*upāsana*) of the *śrīcakra* is the centerpiece of Śrīvidyā practice. When the mantra is repeated as part of *śrīcakra* worship, the adept is assured both worldly prosperity (*śrī*) and the knowledge (*vidyā*) that effects liberation (*mokṣa*).[158] Since it is usually assumed that the adept will follow through on obligations made to the guru, initiation into the *śrīvidyā* is considered among contemporary adepts to be very nearly the equivalent of achieving liberation-while-yet-living (*jīvanmukti*).

Unlike many other mantras, including the Vedic *gāyatrī,* the *śrīvidyā* has no discursive meaning. Rather, it is a series of individual seed-syllables (*bījākṣara*) grouped in three sections or "peaks" (*kūṭa*). Taken individually these seed-syllables are understood as specific aspects of the goddess, each with their own identities and associations. When grouped together, these seeds manifest her complete subtle form (*sūkṣmarūpa*). Unlike the Vedic *gāyatrī,* which is explicit and ordinary (*prakaṭa*), the *śrīvidyā* is concealed and secret (*rahasya*). It is therefore, by definition, superior because it is exclusive.

Within Śrīvidyā, the mantra takes not one form but twelve different forms. Each form of the mantra reflects the various ways in which it was heard by the tradition's quasi-historical sages.[159] While there is much theoretical discussion of the *śrīvidyā*'s twelve forms as they are enumerated in the *Tripurātāpinī Upaniṣad,* only two—the *kādi śrīvidyā* as revealed by Śiva in the form of Kāmarāja and the *hādi śrīvidyā* of the female sage Lopāmudrā, wife of the dwarf-yogi Agastya—have historical importance and are treated in *Tripurā Upaniṣad.*[160] In fact, the Kāmarāja *kādi* form (literally, "beginning with [the syllable] *ka*") revealed in verse 8 appears to dominate historical and contemporary texts involving *śrīcakra* worship.[161] Bhāskararāya writes that of all the forms of the *śrīvidyā,* the Kāmarāja and Lopāmudrā mantras are the most important, ostensibly because they are the most difficult in which to gain initiation. Of the two, he goes on to say, the Kāmarāja *kādi* takes priority (*ādhikya*) even though it is not, theoretically, superior to the others.[162] Along with the mantras that characterize *kādi* and *hādi* traditions are distinctive forms of ritual practice. While *hādi* tradition has many important historical adherents, especially among the Kashmiri strands of Śrīvidyā, *kādi* tradition has undoubtedly become the dominant force in South Indian Śrīvidyā. Bhāskararāya clearly reflects this South Indian view and supports it with reference to pan-Indian Sanskrit texts.

While verses 8 and 9 esoterically reveal the Kāmarāja and Lopāmudrā *vidyās*, it remains unclear from the Upaniṣad how they are to be incorporated into the worship of the *śrīcakra.* Bhāskararāya, stating his preference for the fifteen-syllable version of the Kāmarāja *kādi* mantra, directs the reader to the *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra* for insight into its ritual use.[163]

Most advocates of the Lopāmudrā *hādi* version, such as Amṛtānanda, an important Kashmiri commentator on *Yoginīhṛdaya,* give no indication of how the mantra is used ritually, though Śivānanda outlines a ritual practice that he claims is based on *hādi* tradition.[164] The historical use of the mantra is made more perplexing by the absence of any recent ritual handbooks specifying the use of the Lopāmudrā *hādi* mantra.

From this evidence it seems that Śrīvidyā, from its earliest formulations, acknowledges that its root mantra could be "heard" in different versions. Yet only two versions develop a corresponding ritual relationship with the *śrīcakra.* Of these two, the *hādividyā,* which has historical proponents, appears to have fallen into disuse.

The twelve variations of the *śrīvidyā* and the issue of there being at least two versions of each—one in fifteen syllables, the other in sixteen syllables—leaves one wondering why eminently practical Tantrics developed mantric traditions with incomplete theoretical patterns and no corresponding ritual elements. Historical evidence suggests that mantric traditions may have preceded yantra worship. If this is the case, there remains the possibility that Śrīvidyā merely makes room for concepts, practices, and variations already present within the larger catholic tradition.[165]

The debate over the priority of any one of the twelve established variations of the mantra is of limited usefulness. The issue for adepts is merely with which line of traditional descent one's lineage identifies, since all forms of the mantra are, at least in theory, equally powerful. The preference for either the Kāmarāja or Lopāmudrā mantras stated by textual commentators may be one way Śrīvidyā is able to accommodate its catholic tradition without compromising ritual formulations and practices that take shape in smaller lineage movements.

The more complex issue of the *śrīvidyā* in fifteen syllables or *pañcadaśī* (or *pañcadaśākṣarī*) and in sixteen syllables or *ṣoḍaśī*, is rarely discussed in detail by the most influential Śrīvidyā commentators, such as Bhāskararāya, Amṛtānanda, or Vidyānanda. Some contemporary adepts claim that the sixteenth element is too secret to discuss at all in written texts. This is an unlikely explanation since virtually all other secrets are raised in written texts. According to others, the sixteenth element is not, for one reason or another, a primary constituent of the *śrīvidyā*. Some contemporary adepts maintain that the sixteen-syllable mantra is a specialized version derived from the original fifteen-syllable version developed for use by Śrīvidyā adepts who enter *sannyāsa*. It may, in fact, be the case that the sixteenth element is a later addition to the fifteen-syllable mantra. Further, the sixteen-syllable mantra actually has two forms: one known today as the "light sixteen" or *laghuṣoḍaśī* (which is espoused by Lakṣmīdhara as the highest form of the mantra) and another known as the "great sixteen" or *mahāṣoḍaśī*.[166] All available ritual manuals establish the relationship between the *śrīvidyā* and the *śrīcakra* solely on the basis of the *kādi* version articulated in fifteen syllables and in three "peaks" (*kūṭa*) or sections.

We can conclude that the sixteenth element is, in fact, a special addition to an already complete mantra. It was likely made a part of Śrīvidyā traditions either after the fifteen-syllable forms were fixed, in order to complete a popular symbolic pattern, or it was developed in order to distinguish a form of mantra *upāsana* that goes beyond "ordinary" requirements. In either case, the two mantras provide evidence that within Tantrism there arose movements to distinguish different *sādhanas* within specific traditions and to establish the relative superiority of one over another. Mantras become another way of establishing the superiority of one's own tradition and of distinguishing lines of practice and interpretation within Tantrism. However, traditionalists offer another explanation, one that accounts for these variations on theological grounds.

Stating the issue as a theological question, we may ask: If the goddess is originally One, why does she take on more than one subtle mantric form, especially when her transcendent aspect (*parā*) is limited to one basic form of the *śrīcakra*?[167] Contemporary Śrīvidyā adepts solve the problem in two stages. First, the mantra as it is articulated is not the highest preverbalized level (i.e., the *paśyantī* level) of supreme Speech (*vāc*). It is only a "middle level" (*madhyamā*) distinct from mundane sound (*vaikharī*). Second, the forms of the mantra are interpreted differently because, as they are manifested from the highest sound-level, they have been heard differently by various sages. As one contemporary adept has put it, "Just as the Vedas teach Truth or Knowledge verbalized in many forms through the sages' revelations, so the *śrīvidyā* as a mantric revelation (*śruti*) takes on various forms."[168]

The divisions within Śrīvidyā following from the different forms of the mantra have never played a significant role in either doctrinal or practical formulations. Even the so-called ritual traditions that distinguish *kādi* and *hādi* lineages are far more alike than they are different. Rather, mantric differences and their concomitant ritual uses are glossed over in favor of more controversial interpretations of practice, particularly concerning the use of the *pañcamakāra*.

In the *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya,* Bhāskararāya states clearly his theory of sound and his ideas on the use of the mantra. He systematically identifies both the letters of Sanskrit and the *kādi* mantra's configuration with the *śrīcakra* and creates a direct correspondence with the physical, verbal, and psychic aspects of the human personality. He does not elaborate here on the *nyāsa* process by which the sounds are verbally and physically laid on the various parts of the body during a ritual recitation.[169]

It is in the process of microcosmic/macrocosmic identification involving the worship (*pūjā*) of the *śrīcakra* and the use of the *śrīvidyā* that the Śrīvidyā school expands upon the important Tantric ritual practice of *nyāsa*. Incorporating these ritual activities of assigning sounds, including the *śrīvidyā,* and deities to parts of the human body, and to the *śrīcakra* requires an extensive training in ritual as well as interpretation. In contemporary traditions we see, however, how the emphasis has shifted almost entirely to ritual performance: few adepts are actually familiar with the complex interpretive elements that preoccupy thinkers such as Bhāskararāya. Whether this contemporary situation in which ritual is performed without study of its esoteric symbolism is a degeneration of the intellectual tradition is itself worth considering. It is perhaps more plausible to think of the contemporary situation as not unlike the past: in each generation there appear only a few adepts who master both ritual and intellectual aspects of the tradition. The majority of adepts have a limited familiarity with textual traditions and the sophisticated levels of interpretation involved in their ritual practices. Instead, they concentrate on learning and performing the rituals and gradually develop their understanding of the tradition through these activities.

Neither ritual practices nor the superior mantric and yantric forms of the goddess are meant to undermine the value or importance of worshipping Tripurā with devotion (*bhakti*). Bhāskararāya states clearly his position on the value of all three aspects of the goddess—the physical (*sthūla*) anthropomorphic image, subtle (*sūkṣma*) mantra, and transcendent (*parā*) yantra—relating their role in practice to a Vedic prescription:

> In fact, equal importance [should be given to] each of the three [kinds] of contemplative worship (*upāsti*). Even in regard to the three prescriptions [to worship the goddess in physical, subtle, and transcendent forms] where the results of each are said [to be individually different], there is no means of deciding which is the relevant one when the fruits [of worship] in general are declared just as in the case of the six types of [Vedic] fire sacrifice . . . where the results are accrued collectively and not severally. So . . . the householder should always perform the internal sacrifice and the external sacrifice [as well as] the worship (*arcanaṃ*) of the king of cakras [i.e., the *śrīcakra*], silent repetition of the *vidyā* and praising [Her] names [such as in the *Lalitāsahasranāmastotra*]. This much is the duty of the devotee. Anything else . . . is supererogatory.[170]

Summarizing Tantric Theology and Practice

In summary, we can draw several broad conclusions regarding Śākta Tantric theology and practice from Bhāskararāya's interpretations.

1. Tantrics bring ritual and contemplative practices directly into their cosmological, epistemological, and mythological speculations. Concen-

trating the development of comprehensive physical, mental, and social disciplines, they combine devotion (*bhakti*), action (*karma*), and knowledge (*jñāna*) as means to worldly empowerment and spiritual realization. Distancing themselves from such nondualists as Śaṅkara, Tantrics maintain that Brahman is both One and Many and that action and knowledge are complementary rather than mutually exclusive methods within *sādhana*. The best possible method for gaining liberation and worldly power, therefore, begins with a doctrine that combines (*samuccayavāda*) knowledge (*jñāna*) and action (*karma*), and treats devotion (*bhakti*) essentially as a type of action. The fifth and final stage of liberation, however, is the result of knowledge (*jñāna*) in the form of a direct, personal experience (*anubhava*). *Anubhava* comes about only as a result of acts of ritual, yoga, and devotion and not as a matter of intellectual study. Perfecting Tantric ritual methods will require initiation by a guru, formal ritual instruction in contemplative worship (*upāsana*), and, according to some, rigorous theological training in both intellectual and practical disciplines (*sādhana*), especially *kuṇḍalinī yoga*.

Since Śākta Tantrics consider the universe to be a real emanation of the One Brahman rather than an illusion (*māyā*), divinity's most fundamental forms are manifestations of Reality that can be appropriated and used by the skillful adept. The Tantric seeks a realization of that which is *already* ultimately accomplished. The soul (*ātman*), even before undertaking *sādhana,* is substantially identical to the primordially unified Brahman. The individual traverses *in* Brahman's diverse manifestations, even when she or he lacks the blissful realization of this divine ubiquity. All forms of suffering and evil are only temporary conditions based on a misunderstanding of Brahman's intrinsic nature as bliss (*ānanda*). The Tantric seeks this experience of unconditioned bliss in this present life, and acknowledges that few will achieve it. The Tantric path is, by definition, elitist.

2. The Tantric initiate's *sādhana* entails a complete commitment involving every aspect of his or her intellectual and personal life. The Tantric life, however, may have to be lived in disguise. One should neither draw attention to oneself or to the elements of the discipline that noninitiates may not understand or be qualified to use. This is the essence of what is meant by Tantric "secrecy."

However, a "secret" Tantric discipline is not the individual's only religious obligation. Other concurrent Hindu beliefs and practices may involve the fulfillment of Vedic rites or deal with family or community activities. Since Vedic qualifications for practice are based primarily on issues of gender and of birth into certain castes, these dual obligations can cause the Tantric a conflict of interests. Practically speaking, they often separate Tantric activities and responsibilities from other religious and social duties. For example, it is common for a Śrīvidyā adept who is a twice-born male to perform an occasional (*naimittika*) Vedic ancestral rite before moving on to a specific Tantric ritual designed for a higher end. Once his Vedic obligation is dispensed with, he can move on to his Tantric *sādhana*. Vaidika Tantrics will ordinarily seek some form of reconciliation between Tantric and non-Tantric duties or practices. The double norm of placing Vedic and Tantric forms of *sādhana* side by side or one following the other harmonizes what might otherwise be an irreconcilable juxtaposition of religious duties.

At the same time, Tantrics consider their specific forms of *sādhana* the cumulative evolution of Vedic rites and traditions. Any apparent conflict then between the Vedic and the Tantric is settled by treating the dichotomy either as a misreading of the esoteric source or as an evolution of thought within a single tradition. Bhāskararāya understands Tantric *sādhana* to be selective and private; it is not necessarily designed to replace exoteric Vedic prescriptions but formulated to augment them in several crucial respects. In this sense, he endorses concurrent practices and traditions. In contemporary South India, to cite another example, Śrīvidyā adepts often live public religious lives as members of the orthodox *smārta* brahman community. At the same time, they privately engage in Tantric *sādhana*.[171] The degree to which these Śrīvidyā adepts participate in Kaula-oriented rites varies. Some accept Tantrism's antinomian elements in a metaphorical or even a literal sense while others reject them outright. As we have observed, denying the use of the *pañcamakāra* does not necessarily exclude a Tantric classification.

Tantric *sādhana* may, in certain limited contexts, exempt one from specific Vaidika prescriptions. It is more common, however, to see the adept instructed in ways that minimize external conflicts, especially in situations that would attract attention. Most high-caste Śrīvidyā adepts, both historically and in contemporary circles, would prefer either to ignore or, when necessary, to reconcile Vedic and Tantric conflicts. The precise methods by which these conflicts—whether they involve obligatory (*nitya*) ritual obligations or socially controversial practices (such as the *pañcamakāra*)—are reconciled is a matter left usually to lineages, gurus, and adepts to decide.

3. The impact of Tantrism on ritual, iconography, theology, practice, and devotion has been at least as great as that of any other current in

Indian history, including Vedism itself. Tantrism, with its caste-defying ideals and its seemingly elitist organization, has spread well beyond the boundaries of the closely knit lineages (*paramparā*) that elaborated its theologies and practices. One need only, for example, point to the extraordinary popularity of the *śrīcakra* in public settings all over India.[172] Ideas and practices either first developed or later elaborated in rather small and exclusive Tantric circles have had a remarkable, if not disproportionate, effect on non-Tantric Hindu traditions. Popular practices involving yoga, for example, are thoroughly Tantracized.

4. Tantric theological teaching is perhaps best understood in light of the definition of Brahman as being (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ānanda*). If the earliest Upaniṣads are understood to emphasize Brahman's nature as being (*sat*) and later Kashmiri schools of Tantric Śaivism emphasize the unity of consciousness (*cit*), then Śākta Tantrism emphasizes Brahman as bliss (*ānanda*).[173] While ultimately unconditioned and lacking all conceptualization (*nirvikalpa*), the divine's primordial bliss can be approximated at more mundane levels of human experience. For the Tantric it is brought about by breaking down ordinary social and intellectual distinctions through the ritual use of conventionally prohibited elements, such as *pañcamakāra* and *kāmakalā* meditation. These elements effect a physical experience of bliss by their ingestion and imitation of the ecstasy experienced in the divine union that brings about creation of the universe. Further, they function to dissolve any notion that the Tantric is bound to ordinary social conventions or religious restrictions. The Tantric's preferential treatment of bliss (*ānanda*) as the characteristic form of Brahman and his preoccupation with one's personal experience (*anubhava*) of bliss is strictly a matter of emphasis; it is not an issue disputed by non-Tantrics.

Yet it is precisely this emphasis on the personal experience of bliss (*ānanda*) that enables Tantrics to justify their most controversial positions. At the same time, it reveals important practical considerations for understanding contemplative worship (*upāsana*). Since the individual soul (*ātman*) is identical to Brahman and the diverse universe is nondual (*advaita*) and blissful (*ānanda*) in essence, there is nothing to prevent the adept from liberation-while-yet-living (*jīvanmukti*). The adept who knows that he or she is so liberated cares not for what happens to the body at death. Unlike other Tantrics who discuss bodily immortality as one of the primary benefits of *sādhana,* Śrīvidyā adepts have little interest in such matters. In one of his most memorable comments, Bhāskararāya writes:

> The nature of the Self of All is explained [to mean that] Brahmā is the Creator of the World, Viṣṇu the Maintainer and Rudra the Destroyer. Why should one necessarily elaborate? A slave, a fisherman, a cheat, every living being is that [Self of all in] "the form of the universe.". . . So let the body fall by its accumulated [karma] anytime, anywhere, there is nothing special about it, because what is to be accomplished has already been accomplished . . . in the *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra* [it says]. . . . one who has done what is to be done in all respects, if he leaves the body in the house of a butcher or in [the holy city of] Kāśī there is no difference: He is liberated while yet living.[174]

Bhāskararāya, like so many other predominantly high-caste Hindu Tantrics, affirms the need to uphold the appearances of conventional Hindu morality. In his independent treatises and commentaries on Tantra, Bhāskararāya does not hesitate to use Vedic principles of interpretation or practice to elucidate Tantric concepts. At the same time, he denies that any such "mundane" or worldly distinctions are ultimately significant to one's destiny.

This dual-edged strategy for living in both Tantric and Vedic worlds is characteristic of Hindu Tantrics following Sanskrit-based traditions, yet it is not uniquely Tantric. Non-Tantric Vedānta theologians who espouse nondualistic (*advaita*) Tantrism also maintain that in the final state of realization all ritual and social distinctions vanish.

Śākta Tantrics, however, in contrast to exoteric Śāṅkarites and other Vedānta traditions do not reify the distinction between worldly and spiritual life. Rather, Tantrics intend to collapse all types of distinctions. One may or may not be a formal renunciate, the issue is a matter resolved within lineages; rejection of renunciation as a formal institution, however, is Tantrism's dominant viewpoint. *Sannyāsa,* according to the Tantric, simply reifies a false distinction between the worldly and spiritual life. Further, ritual actions (*karma*) should not be separated from search for knowledge (*jñāna*). Tantrics seek to affirm the material world's transcendent value and to recognize the imminent opportunities of human birth. In this way they further distinguish themselves from other, non-Tantric traditions of nondualism.

By dissolving socially accepted distinctions between the sacred and the profane—that is, by making what is understood to be separate and the forbidden into something religiously transformative and, at some level, socially acceptable—they create a situation in which excess and hedonism can flourish. Bhāskararāya is aware of the potential for excess in Tantric *sādhana* and notes the dangerous religious consequences that befall the errant Tantric. Undoubtedly, he also wished to distinguish the "legitimate" Kaula tradition from the excesses associated with it. He maintains the classical Tantric view that defends the most radical "left-hand" practices by placing them in a strictly controlled context. Other more conservative Tantrics, such as Lakṣmīdhara, dissociate themselves completely from Tantrism's "unacceptable" antinomian elements and thus preserve the ethical values of the Vaidika tradition. In contemporary South India, many high-caste Śrīvidyā adepts have followed Lakṣmīdhara's lead. They have dissociated themselves from Tantrism and reject the appellation as a description of their *sādhana*.

5. As we have seen, the doctrine of liberation while living (*jīvanmukti*) and the disdain expressed for the body after death does not mean that Tantrics disregard the value of the material world. According to Śrīvidyā, Śakti is herself the universe in the form of Prosperity (*śrī*). An unmediated knowledge (*vidyā*) of her, that is, a Śrī-vidyā, brings the adept all possible human aims (*puruṣārtha*). Contemporary adepts go to great lengths to attribute whatever good fortune befalls them to their Tantric practice. Similarly, misfortune is explained as the result of previous karma or as merely a temporary situation.

In short, the Tantrics' worldview when compared to the non-Tantric Vaidikas' is anything but extraordinary or exotic. Rather, it explains the world as utterly intelligible and affirms that one can act to transcend a merely mundane experience of existence. One need not simply cope with daily life, though Tantric *sādhana* is also designed to make ordinary suffering bearable. The Tantric lives in the hope that God will come to one's aid; there is the belief that one can aspire to and, indeed, achieve greatness through one's own efforts. Life is not a vale of tears but rather a potentially blissful experience of the divine.

Tantric cosmology and theology are designed as much for understanding the present social and religious life as they are a description of the transcendent's relationship with creation.

6. Last, we should again emphasize that Tantric tradition is rooted in a personal commitment to a path directed and, in large part, defined by a guru. The teacher as a manifestation of the divine need not be living nor necessarily exist in human form, though usually this is common. Thus, Tantrism as a type of "guru-ism" (*guruvāda*) entails a tested but unswerving devotion to tradition and teacher, without whom all is for naught.

Tantric texts that are not engaged by the adept as part of his lineage or guru's canon of teaching, remain inert, or outside the boundaries of scripture. It is the guru who establishes the vital relationship between text and lineage and the guru who decides which texts, concepts, or practices are introduced into a Tantric lineage. Mere ideological or practical compatibility does not in itself function to make a text sacred. While Tantrics are not ready to admit that the creation of a canon of sacred texts is a human endeavor performed by the people for whom these texts are significant, they take a small step in that direction by asserting that the guru as a divine embodiment is the arbiter of the canon, and therefore the final authority for determining what is and is not scripture.

4 Conclusion: Present and Future Tantric Studies

The discussion of Śākta Tantrism must continue to focus primarily on the texts and practices we classify under this heading. Without a mastery of Tantric texts and traditions, and an understanding of the role Tantrism continues to play in Indian religions, we can make no claims to advancing the comparative study of religion. This descriptive explanation of concepts and practices within their historical contexts constitutes the "what" of religious studies. It must be carried on with all the academic tools at our disposal: historical evidence must be made relevant, philological and textual investigation must continue, and anthropological and theological studies must increase our presently inadequate understandings. However, these projects must not be done at the expense of other important issues: we must not consider only the "what" of religion, but the "so what."[1]

To launch into the details of Tantric theory and practice without a methodological basis for study and without considering to what end this study is directed will inevitably leave us without a solid definitional basis for continuing our work and with no means for comparison. As Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, and others have observed, we must find a methodological middle way between narrow particularism and empty generalization.[2] There is nothing self-evident about the importance of Tantric studies any more than there is something intrinsically important about the corpus of data we identify as Hinduism.[3] To base our interest on the data "for their own sake" is not to study religion but to assume the stance of the theologian within the tradition that is the subject of study.[4] And to indulge in the study of the religions of others solely to understand their ideas and practices is equally untenable. Such an effort has no purpose other than the simple satisfaction we acquire when we learn something unfamiliar or exotic. The study of religion must be an investigation of the possibilities of the human imagination, not simply the acquisition of data for their own sake. Without a theory, question, or paradigm that addresses some fundamental issue in the academic imagination and a method for correlating data, we have nothing at stake and no good reason to care about our findings.

Therefore as we begin to define and classify Tantrism we must address why its investigation is not merely a curious intellectual affair in the study of religion. Tantric studies are an urgent necessity, central not only to correcting our deficient understanding of Hinduism but to the investigation of human nature. One way in which the comparative project can proceed is to ask questions with equal importance to all religions. Put in the broadest terms, our question is: What do we learn about humans when we study Hindu Tantrism? To frame the basic issue in more distinctive sociological terms, we may ask, as Weber asked: How do religious ideas relate to the way in which a society works?[5]

Tantrism is at once an "interior," esoteric movement with roots in widely divergent Indian religions, and an influential, historically varied, and widespread popular phenomenon that has spread beyond India's boundaries. In its Śākta Hindu formulations, especially those represented by writers in Sanskrit, we observe the preoccupation of Indian thinkers with social structures that define notions of hierarchy and religious value. Tantrics, by redefining the notion of religious qualification (*adhikāra*), reframe the Hindu ideology that structures Indian society. In this respect, Tantrism is not significantly different than other reform movements in Hinduism, such as medieval devotionalism (*bhakti*). More important, Tantrics question conventional socioreligious boundaries, but not at the expense of their identity as Hindus.

The Tantrics we have studied here are as concerned with the stability of their Hindu society as they are with changing it. However, Tantrics create alternatives that threaten to undermine some of normative brahmanism's most treasured values. As religious virtuosi usually born into socially privileged brahman castes, Śrīvidyā Tantrics represent both the most deeply conservative and the most radical and progressive tendencies in Hinduism. They present a case not unlike the virtuosi in other religious traditions. Coming from a religiously and socially privileged group, they wield influence beyond their immediate peers. Their intellectual and aesthetic achievements affect not only the few with whom they have close contact but the many who, in one way or another, are profoundly changed by their presence, whether or not they are aware of it.[6] Part of our investigation of

Tantrism must focus on why this situation developed and how has it been perpetuated. We need to understand more precisely Tantrism's role and influence in the development of Hindu traditions just as we need to know more about how Tantrics imagine themselves vis à vis other Hindus.

We come to know about Tantrics not primarily by what they say about themselves as individuals. Like others in Indian tradition, Tantrics place a premium on egoistic anonymity; the relinquishment of the transient (and therefore false) self is at the heart of India's religious and social ideology. Attaining this authentic anonymity—either to allow oneself realization or to open oneself to God's grace—requires the aspirant to meet a series of complex social expectations. The ideal of authentic anonymity is formulated on the ethical paradigm of the unknown yogi. The perfectly anonymous yogi completely transcends the limitations of the individual personality. In the memory of others he or she may retain the particular personality traits that mark an individual. But these characteristics become inextricably woven into ideals and archetypes that transcend individuality. The yogi achieves the ultimate goal of "dissolution" into the Whole and, at the same time, achieves "true" autonomy in the social world by fulfilling the ultimate Dharma, liberation.[7] The Tantric, like the yogi, does not necessarily seek autonomy in the sense of a self-realizing freedom achieved apart from others. Rather, the Tantric offers yet another example of the yogi/ascetic/spiritual adept whose most sublime achievements and actions are seen to be part of an undivided social self. The Tantric yogi maintains the outward appearances of the worldly Hindu householder. It is the fulfillment of Dharma, rather than its relinquishment, that characterizes authentic anonymity.

The practical effect of the Hindu's religious ideology is to create a group of peers, an elite who keep in check those whose individual aspirations may threaten to undermine the stability of the whole system. While Tantrism emphasizes the power of the individual to take control of his or her personal destiny, it stresses equally that the Hindu must realize the inherent unity of existence. Harmonious relations among things, the Hindu understands, depends upon balance, reciprocity, and cooperation.

An understanding of Tantrism grows first from the works of Tantric authors. These works must be contextualized and studied critically in their particular theological settings since they form the primary evidence of Tantric tradition. Yet to appreciate Tantric tradition is also to acknowledge that the Tantric's preinterpretive agenda is not unlike that of other Hindus and, indeed, not radically different from that of other Indian religions.

Tantric writings are far more concerned with advancing what is perceived to be "tradition" than they are with establishing an author's personal fame or renown. Personal fame or spiritual advancement, it seems, was to be achieved principally by perpetuating a sense of tradition that encompasses the individual's deeds. Many Tantrics, including Bhāskararāya, gained both fame and fortune by virtue of their reputation for learning. It is not merely *what* they wrote that secured their position within historical Hinduism. Rather, it was their ability to match certain ideals, such as the subordination of one's own egoistic identity, in the service of a greater end, the perpetuation of Dharma as the sustaining and enduring manifestation of Veda. As we have seen, contemporary Śrīvidyā adepts who strongly disagree with Bhāskararāya's positions nevertheless find his work worth commending. It is not simply ignorance of the content of Bhāskararāya's work that has brought about this admiration of Bhāskararāya, nor can we assume that the legends surrounding him and other Tantrics are mere fictions or literary inventions of hero worship. Rather, the Tantric guru/scholar offers an example of the fully authentic person who has achieved human perfection. As society's collective representation of the ideal yogi or "ascetic householder" he is significant not as an individual but as an embodiment of divinity in human form. He is, at once, perfectly himself and yet no longer merely the person who is defined by an ego. For Hindus, individuality itself rather than self is the key delimiting factor in human experience. Tantric *sādhana,* as the Tantric sees it, presents the best method by which this universal problem can be solved.

It is not Bhāskararāya's Tantrism itself that has given him the paradigmatic status of the sage and yogi—despite the opinion of his sectarian followers. Instead it is the more widespread perception of his works as meeting the necessary qualifications of the Hindu religious ideal. What is remembered about Bhāskararāya by contemporary South Indian Śrīvidyā adepts are not the few biographical remarks he makes in his own writings. Rather, he is recalled by the miracles and other achievements that are recorded in the biography attributed to his disciple Umānanda. Though Bhāskararāya was an eighteenth-century writer, he is nearly as anonymous today in the factual, biographical sense as any of his revered predecessors.

In general, we observe that the actual historical picture of the Tantric is partial and disjointed. He is routinely painted as a cloudy figure whose stature is measured not exclusively by what he says but by how he says it; and he is one whose life is valued not because of years in service to the tradition but because of the underlying value placed on an ideal of human perfection that subordinates individuality for another sense of self. As a Tantric and a yogi, we can expect a guru such as Bhāskararāya to behave in certain ways and even to write self-consciously in a particular style. His writings and biography leave little doubt in our minds that he considered himself, and was considered by others, as a stalwart of tradition rather than as a revolutionary. In true Hindu style, he left it to others to determine if he is, in fact, a sage and an embodiment of divinity.

When seen in light of broader Indian paradigms of ideal behavior, the Tantric's influence on and authority over the whole of Hindu society is more easily understood. The individual's personality, however it may have affected a Tantric teacher's popularity in his own day, will not alone suffice to explain the influence of Tantrics on subsequent generations in India.

Tantric "guruism," when it is most influential and persistent over time and space, is not a cult of personality but a familiar manifestation of Indian religious and social ideals. Tantric gurus are examples of the Hindu notion that divinity is embodied in human representations. In short, the Tantric does not so much deviate from the mainstream of Hindu expectations as he fulfills them. Viewed critically, the Tantric guru, like the Tantric text, is not merely what he, or it, says or is interpreted as saying by followers. Tantric gurus and texts are signs that function as more, and sometimes less, than they appear at first to be.

Given our propensity to think of books as things to be read and interpreted and persons as discreet individuals whose lives, in some sense, are fully grasped when we have seen or heard or read their works, the Tantric is indeed less than what we might understand a writer or a person to be. For the Hindu whose ideal it is to deny a sense of individuality in order to affirm the self, the Tantric is but one example among many. In the social sense, it is by conforming to expectations surrounding this ideal that the Tantric gains stature and influence, and it is through his efforts to meet these expectations that he nurtures an enduring legacy. When a Tantric is rejected, either for what he says or for how he is perceived to behave, we observe that it is principally on the grounds that he has perverted the expectations of a perceived catholic Hindu ideal. He has drawn too much attention either to himself or to his teachings. In both cases he violates the religious ideal of personal anonymity within a socially constructed reality that values, above all else, the ultimate submergence of self in the collective self.

As in other Hindu traditions, we observe in Śākta Tantrism no single individual, no one dominant text or canon of texts. While Veda and Tantra function as representative notions of a collective or communal ideal, they cannot be limited to easily defined canons of sacred literature or practice. Further, we see no evidence within Tantric sources of individual writers wishing to leave their own distinctive mark on tradition. There is always an appeal to earlier precedents or traditions that validate a particular interpretation. Tantrics subordinate individuality for reasons that, in Hindu terms, make perfect sense: becoming whole as a Hindu is becoming perfectly integrated into life's roles as they unfold within the boundaries of Dharma. In the historical sense, however, Tantric writers do leave distinctive marks on texts and traditions; the point is simply that there is rarely anything in these marks that identify the writer as an egoistic personality.

While the Tantric alters the rules by which Hindu roles are ordinarily determined, specifically by changing the criteria for admission into initiated Tantric tradition, the underlying basis remains unchanged: the Tantric Hindu believes one is born into and, in some sense, must fulfill a karmic destiny. The Tantric takes for granted that his Tantric initiation is a privileged destiny; he holds himself above others in the sense of having reached a stage in the cycles of rebirth that he believes is final. Unlike all other Hindus, the Tantric believes his end is within his immediate grasp. Yet this ideal dictates an inverse proportion of ego and individuality. Among contemporary adepts who are less than paradigmatic, this relinquishment of individual egoism is sometimes glaringly absent.

Yet Tantrics generally do not wish to distinguish themselves as individuals any more than do other Hindus. The types of secrecy that characterize Śākta Tantrism generally preserve the appearance of the social status quo. At the same time, secrecy is a principle of the Tantric community's notion of religious privilege. Tantrics are seen gaining worldly and social preeminence not by rejecting common classical Hindu values but by reasserting them—in this case by adopting the common notion of the homogeneous and anonymous presence of the spiritual adept. In a sense, Tantric writers become more than ordinary persons, or rather fully human. Put in Hindu terms, they become divine by becoming less than what others assume themselves to be: the adept is no longer an individual whose individual acts are more important than the greater ideal. This is not to say that Tantric adepts are perfectly egoless, as the theologian contends, but rather that their actions and ideals more often than not conform to the established religious patterns that order Hindu society. It is when Tantrics meet these expectations and, at the same time, address current dilemmas with efficacious teachings that they, and their traditions, exercise their greatest influence. Since the majority of Śākta Tantrics come from already privileged segments of the Indian population, their private and secret traditions complement their feelings of social superiority. By maintaining a "double norm," Tantrics have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Critics within and outside Tantrism, who reject Tantric ideals as bizarre and antinomian, reflect their own emotional and ethical repugnance to Tantric ideology and refuse to consider Tantrism critically within Indian religions. Tantric antinomianism is part of a deliberate effort by which Tantrics can extend and expand upon the classical Hindu religious paradigm. That is, it is part of the unstated effort to become more than simply another characterization of the paradigmatic yogi in perfect control of himself and his environment, a person so thoroughly in tune with society that he effectively vanishes by being absorbed into its divine essence.

The Tantrics' success in this respect is measured not by the content of their teaching but by its affect on subsequent Indian religion and history. That they fail to meet the moral expectations of some segments in Indian society is hardly surprising. What is perhaps more startling to us is the extent to which this esotericism is rooted in classical Hindu religious paradigms and social expectations. While the Vaidika Tantrics we have examined attempt to exempt themselves from the criticism commonly leveled at other members of the privileged brahman tradition, their efforts are not unopposed. They are, in their own view, no longer suffering from the intellectual sterility of their philosophically oriented peers. Nor are they, like their ritualist brethren, preoccupied with ritualism.

Tantrics offer rejuvenation, not complete renovation; they are radical and innovative enough to win over the critics of traditionalism and conservative enough to claim continuity with the Vedic and Hindu past. It is this very position between a rejection of the past and a completely new vision of the future that makes them the repeated targets of criticism and innuendo, which may or may not be justified. Tantrism presents before the Hindu imagination both new and old sets of symbols and ideals. Tantrics do not merely present to other Hindus new symbols, which reestablish an inherently conservative body of traditions. Rather, they dare to use symbols in bold and innovative ways and refuse to accept that humans are limited to single points of view.

In sum, Tantrics, by their own admission, may be something strange, yet nothing new.[8] Their aims reflect the dual concerns that preoccupy Indian thought: a passionate concern for social order and a method by which one can resolve the basic human dilemma, which, stated in Hindu terms, entails achieving a perfect understanding of the ambiguous situation surrounding death and rebirth. To "die" to one's own individuality is not to lose one's true identity but to gain ontological permanence by merging with nature and society's truest forms.

The Hindu worldview, and especially its Tantric version, leaves nothing to chance. The world and God are not only utterly intelligible, they can be appropriated, understood, and used to advance oneself *and* society. The Tantric's vision goes beyond other Hindu systems significantly in this respect: the Tantric holds that individual salvation affects the whole of society. Tantric adepts, with few exceptions, remain *in* society and, by claiming access to the power that regulates the whole environment, bring themselves into positions of social and religious influence.

The issue of complete intelligibility of the world may, philosophically speaking, be understood as a Hindu restatement of the issue of freedom and determinism. To what extent do humans control their own destiny? Put in theological terms, Tantrics reassert the dichotomy between the importance of human action and the necessity of divine grace. At what point does one's self-effort give way to other forces? The difficult question for the scholar who examines Tantrism remains why Tantrics chose their particular forms of thought and action as alternatives to the established Hindu order.

To undertake a study of Hindu Tantrism, then, is to begin not only with texts, writers, historical practices, and ideas but with an appreciation of the horizon of expectations assumed by Hindus. We must begin with a preinterpretive awareness of what we bring to the investigation. Studies in semiotics offer a fruitful method by which we can assess the significance of the culturally constructed rules that create these expectations. Jonathan Culler writes:

> The meaning of a work is its answers to the questions posed by a horizon of expectations. To understand the interaction between a work and the reading public we must reconstruct this horizon, which at a given moment is the result of three principal factors: previous understanding of the genre in question, the form and theme of earlier works assumed to be known, and the distinction between poetic and practical language, which will be differently situated in different periods.[9]

In the case of Hindu Tantric literature, we must consider the relationship not only between Vedic *śruti* and Tantra but between the text as source of tradition and the guru as arbiter of tradition. Our task is first to understand how texts are received both in different intellectual settings and by different types of Hindus. In general, for Hindus, religious "texts" are not necessarily books to be read and interpreted anymore than Tantric "gurus" must be actual, historical persons whose factual biographies are significant for understanding their lives and works. For Bhāskararāya, the *Tripurā Upaniṣad* is first and foremost not a series of ideas, which as a Vaidika Tantric he must interpret, but an objective representation of Truth (*veda*) that in some sense transcends human relationships. Similarly, the Tantric guru himself is considered by disciples a form of divinity, one whose words and actions become secondary to this more essential fact.

Tantrics understand gurus and texts not as specific historical facts to be evaluated. Rather, their meaning is found in the transsubjective horizon of expectations surrounding texts, teachers, and traditions in Hindu society.[10] For the Vaidika Tantric the Upaniṣad as *śruti* is treated as a kind of verbal icon: it is at once a venerated work of art that reveals the divine in the act of recitation and an infallible text with meaning and important consequences for those capable of understanding it. Its reality then is *performative,* as a verbal manifestation of Truth (*veda*), and *existential,* both in the sense of its being a tangible form of Brahman manifest as sound (*śabda*) *and* a series of verses with meanings to be interpreted. Likewise, the Tantric guru is both an existential ideal, perfect in form and unaltering in nature, and, at the same time, a creative, dynamic, and performative being who, like Śakti herself, is both One and Many. The same can be said of the *śrīcakra:* it is at once a venerated, static work of art and the beginning of a performative ritual expression of the highest truths.

While a semiotic theory does not address adequately the historical dimension of our studies, it does offer us another way in which to approach the possible meanings we derive from history and texts. The dialectic of continuity and innovation that characterizes the intellectual ferment of Tantric tradition is indicative of the very essence of the Hindu experience of life: human life, like all of the universe vital in its essence, emanates from a Reality that is simultaneously expanding to become Many and returning to Itself. Fundamental essence and creative change are not only the divine's own nature and the way of the natural world, but also at the center of society's most rudimentary functions.

For the Tantric the aims of life are not different than those of other Hindus. Since it is generally agreed that few Hindus will achieve life's most coveted goals in their present birth, the Tantrics' offer is radical only in its expediency and in the methods proposed for attaining these ends.

Our studies indicate that Hindu Tantric esotericism is neither completely new nor is it merely a rehash of antiquated ideas destined, as the non-Tantric views it, to failure. To understand these religious virtuosi and the influence they have on the popular, exoteric Hindu tradition, we must grapple seriously with their most basic suppositions: There exists a transcendent reality that is of eternal and divine origin that is immanent in *this* world. For the Tantric, the transcendent can be made immediately present if one is willing to commit oneself to the risky business of change in one's present life.

PART TWO
The Secret of the Three Cities

Introduction

The Sanskrit text used in the translation of Bhāskararāya's commentary on the *Tripurā Upaniṣad* is an emended or "corrected" version of the 1922 edition of *Kaula and Other Upaniṣads,* edited by Sitarama Shastri as volume 11 of the Tantrik Texts Series (edited by A. Avalon). A recent (1981) edition entitled *Sri Tripuropanishad with Two Bhashyas* by P. N. Pattabhirama Shastri includes not only Bhāskararāya's commentary but also a version of the commentary by Rāmānanda.[1] This text merely reprints the Sitarama version of Bhāskararāya's commentary, though it fails to acknowledge its source.

It was my original intention to produce a completely new Sanskrit edition of the *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya.* However, after discussing the matter with contemporary adepts, I decided that such a project would, in fact, create a "new" text; this effect ran counter to my desire to study the text as part of the contemporary Tantric tradition. The Tantrik Text Series edition (and the recent Pattabhirama Shastri reprint) remains, in fact, the popular version among contemporary Śrīvidyā adepts in South India. It is, for the most part, a reliable and readable edition. I offer here only minor emendations and corrections based on a review of manuscripts from two South Indian libraries. These manuscripts I shall deal with shortly; more important is the logic behind using the "old" edition.

After a prolonged search for manuscripts among contemporary Śrīvidyā adepts in South India I came to the conclusion that very few lineages any longer bothered to keep private manuscripts either of the Śrīvidyā Upaniṣads or, for that matter, any Sanskrit Tantric text that is now available in print. Most had long settled on the Avalon edition of the text, that is, the version that appears in *Kaula and Other Upaniṣads*. This fact has considerable importance for our study of Tantrism since it marks a major transition in the history of Tantric thought.

A text or, in this case, a series of texts once entirely private, indeed deeply secret (*atirahasya*), are now transmitted only in publicly accessible, printed editions. In a period of about sixty-five years Tantrics have changed not only the method by which they transmit (some) texts, but to some extent the very notion of a text itself. As Jack Goody and others have pointed out, transitions in technology can significantly alter a society's understanding of itself and its traditions.[2] In this case, the effects of technology are profound, as are the implications for Tantric self-understanding.

Contemporary adepts were not unwilling to alter the printed version of the Upaniṣad. In fact, it was precisely because it was printed or, more precisely, because it was edited by someone outside their lineage that they felt perfectly justified in emending it. As a public document, the text could easily have been "corrupted," misread, or interpolated. Even without manuscripts against which to compare it, some Śrīvidyā adepts still maintained their right to offer emendations or their own interpolations. Few thought of trying to obtain manuscript versions when they disagreed or had a doubt about the printed edition—either because they did not know where to look for them or because they felt it unnecessary to go to such lengths to "correct" the printed edition. There was, in short, nothing sacred about the printed word per se and no indication that simply because the text had been edited by a learned pundit that it was beyond corruption or interpolation. The printed text was suspect but still, for the most part, treated as an authority to be reckoned with. As one adept put it:

> We cannot trust printed texts but we have no choice but to begin with them. The traditions are not what they once were, few people have texts in their homes any longer and the few of us interested in them do not have the money or time to search the libraries for manuscripts. As a result, many texts are edited by those without qualification (*anadhikāra*) and sometimes many interpolations find their way into the printed book.[3]

For those adepts who disagree with the printed text not on grammatical but on ideological grounds, the editing of the text becomes a means by which it can be changed or even disavowed. A few contemporary adepts, for example, claimed that references to the *pañcamakāra* and *kāmakalādhyāna* were interpolations into the Upaniṣad; in other cases, the claim was that Bhāskararāya had not really intended what he said. Such problems adepts could easily explain as the fault of ill-equipped editors. In other words, the technological and historical transition to print has now become part of the method of interpretation—used to suit whatever end the adept seeks. In short, oral traditions remain the arbiter of scriptural authority.

Further, it appears that the shift from hand-copied to printed texts is less an influence of encroaching science on a pretechnological culture than it is a reflection of increasing social and intellectual pressures on traditional India. These influences, some of which are directly attributable to foreigners, precipitated the growth of manuscript libraries filled with traditional texts—including Tantric texts—and permitted for the first time genuine public access to previously secret traditions. Tantrics have been profoundly affected by this new situation surrounding the transmission of their written sources and many have attributed their willingness to discuss issues publicly to this new accessibility of texts. In an effort to defend, apologize, or distance themselves from "public" textual traditions, Śrīvidyā Tantrics have come forward to make their views a part of the public record.

In a profoundly different sense the printed text has become a kind of substitute for the private manuscript. When a text is edited within one's lineage it is not only accepted into tradition but, in effect, becomes an edition beyond criticism. For a few adepts with copies of the printed text with the handwritten notes of gurus in the margins, the book has become a kind of relic, a sacred object associated with the power of the persons with whom it has been connected. In this sense, the Upaniṣad has gone beyond being a book to be read and interpreted: it is a sacred object, an icon kept with other comparable artifacts and made part of the legacy of a lineage's tradition. While the text itself may be changed or emended in the margins and may still be occasionally read by adepts within a lineage, its status has changed dramatically. It is no longer simply a potentially flawed printed edition of a historical commentary on a *śruti*. Rather, it is an object of religious power that is venerated as the possession of the guru. It is set apart from other profane objects, and passed along to others not because of what it *says* but because of what it *is*. The book is now thought to be something in addition to being a text that is read: it has acquired the residual powers of those who have possessed it. In other words, the power of the text is not merely in its contents and in its ability to transform the adept who studies it or practices its injunctions. Rather, its power is also an effect of its religious role within a lineage tradition. While we may think of a book of this kind as something to be interpreted, in the present setting of Tantric tradition such a book has become a tangible aspect of divinity itself.

Here, in Part Two, I offer a translation of the *Tripurā Upaniṣad* with Bhāskararāya's commentary, which may or may not affect the Upaniṣad's transmission and understanding within contemporary lineages. I deal with the text from the perspective of those for whom it is a multidimensional scripture. Thus, rather than attempt to create new scripture by producing a new edition—an effect which history has recently demonstrated is at least a possibility—I have left the Sanskrit text largely untouched and dealt with translation as part of a broader study of living Tantrism. As I have argued earlier, the scholar must rely on oral interpretations to arrive at an accurate translation. In this case, however, it seemed a matter of importance to take the text as it is best known in India today in order to fit it squarely within the living traditions' understandings.

The emendations and annotations offered in the notes were undertaken as part of a collaborative study with two distinguished Śrīvidyā adepts. Our aims were limited to developing a slightly altered version that would resolve some of the printed edition's most difficult problems and "knots" (*grantha*). Working from the Sitarama Shastri edition is therefore not a scholarly compromise based on exigency but part of an overall plan of study.

Of the four manuscripts I eventually reviewed in manuscript libraries (all open to the public), I deemed two of them most useful for the present study. Neither text was entirely satisfactory, though both deviated in details from Sitarama Shastri's version; I hesitate to assert that the emended Sanskrit version produced in the translation's endnotes is in any way "critical." Instead most of the difficult portions of the Tantrik Texts Series edition are now resolved. The manuscripts consulted are described below:

1. A Telegu script version of the *Tripurā Upaniṣad* with Bhāskararāya's commentary interspersed between verses is available in the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library in Madras as part of the Madras University collections. This copy from an earlier manuscript (of which there is no mention) is written into a ledger notebook. Produced by one K. Sastry in 1916, the manuscript bears the catalogue number 1044 but is, according to the present librarians, catalogued now under "a different system." It is a fair copy of the text, though not without copyist errors, and, despite its nebulous origins, it proved a valuable resource. This Telegu script version was then copied by hand and compared with the original for errors. It is referred to in the translation notes under GOML (Government Oriental Manuscripts Library version). Pundit T. Sanjeeva Rao of Madras assisted in copying the Telegu text into Devanagari script.

2. A manuscript copied onto paper, also of uncertain age and without clear historical origins, was provided by the Adyar Library and Research Centre. A photocopy of this was made with the consent of the Adyar Library director, Dr. K. Kunjinniraja. The manuscript, like the GOML version, placed Bhāskararāya's commentary between each verse and provided not only excellent grammatical clarifications but additional, "new" materials. This text is referred to as Adyar in the notes.

3. A second manuscript in the Government Oriental Manuscripts library exists in Devanagari script and was copied into a small ledger in 1906 by an unknown copyist from an unknown source(s?). The book is in an unfortunate state of decay, and Dr. Venkataraghavan of Madras was kind enough to help me retrieve certain portions of the text that proved useful. This is referred to only once in the translation notes as GOML II.

4. A manuscript in Malayalam script from the Adyar Library was reviewed but presented no significant differences from the other available sources. It was, in fact, filled with copyist errors (mostly grammatical) but proved useful for confirming the discoveries made in GOML and Adyar.

5. A manuscript appearing in Grantha script was shown to me in Madras by a contemporary Śrīvidyā adept who claimed that it had passed through his lineage for at least three generations. Only briefly consulted, it confirmed findings in GOML and Adyar.

Last, mention should be made of several "corrected" versions of the Tantrik Texts Series edition which, in the end, produced few alterations in the Sanskrit edition but offered tremendous insight into the modern interpretation of the work.

Śrī

The Great Upaniṣad of Tripurā
OM! May Speech be in my mind!
Let there be Prosperity!
[This is] Bhāskararāya's commentary
on the Tripurāmahopaniṣad
OM! Peace, Peace, Peace

> How can it be said that one does not see the arising of one lotus in [yet another] lotus when the two feet of the teacher (*śrī nātha*) [touch] the thousand-petalled [lotus of my own head]?[1]
>
> I shall now comment on that great Upaniṣad consisting of sixteen verses, belonging to the central portion of the *Āraṇyaka;* studied by *Ṛg* Vedic experts (*bahvṛca*) who perform rituals in accordance with the *Śrī Sāṅkhyāyanakalpasūtra,* to whom the mantras are those belonging to the *Śākala* school [of the *Ṛg Veda*], and for whom *Kauṣītaka* is the [ritual] *Brāhmaṇa* [text followed].[2]

Indeed those belonging to the three estates [of Aryan society] should study the Veda, dividing it into two parts: the initial (*pūrva*) [or ritual portions] and the later (*uttara*) [or speculative portions].[3] Despite its [division into] two parts this [Veda] intends (*pravṛttaḥ*) to enjoin specific action(s) either directly or indirectly.[4] Some acts (*kriyā*) are associated with deities, as in the worship of Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and Agni, while others are not associated with deities, such as bathing (an image as an accessory) form part of a fire sacrifice (*agnihotra*).[5] Adepts (*adhikāriṇaḥ*) who believe (*viśvāsaśīla*) in a soul different from the body, one capable of going to and returning from the other [heavenly] worlds, indulge in rituals (*kriyā*) that yield otherworldly results. Similarly, only those believing in the power (*śakti*) within deities that, despite being unseen, is capable of granting desires, indulge in the worship of Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, and others. Bādarāyana and others advocated [the worship of] images of deities intending only such persons.[6] But despite the real presence (*devatāsadbhāva*) of the deities, believers wavering in faith due to the karma of previous births are qualified only for the rituals (*karma*) described in the initial (*pūrva*) section [of the Veda] and are not [qualified] for [contemplative] worship (*upāsana*) of the deities. Jaimini and others, intending only these people [wavering in faith], advocated only the doctrine of ritual priority (*karmaprādhānyavāda*) thereby rejecting the five forms of deities, including images.[7] When some who have performed ritual actions (*karma*) diligently and whose karma has come to fruition undertake the [external] worship (*pūjā*) of Śiva, they are ridiculed in [Nārāyanakaṇṭha's] *Mṛgendra Saṃhitā* commentary for enjoining the abandonment of Ritualist (*mīmāṃsaka*) doctrines.[8]

But even those contemplative worshipers (*upāsaka*) of a deity who know the secret intention of the five forms that include images and the rest, need not reject the doctrine of the priority of ritual action.[9] In a situation in which those diligent in ritual actions are yet without any special ripening of the mind, the conviction (*viśvāsa*) to perform [contemplative worship (*upāsana*) of a deity] won't occur. Destructive logic [shows us that] if doubt arises in that object on which one depended previously then there occurs a loss of both [one's previous faith and that which has not yet been fully understood]. Hence, in order to protect those [dependent on ritual actions alone for their faith] even contemplative worshipers (*upāsaka*) should [continue to] perform rituals (*karma*) in the same way, as if they had conviction [in their absolute efficacy]. [It is] with this intention [Kṛṣṇa states in the *Bhagavadgītā*]:

> You too must act considering everyone's welfare.[10]

These and others [similar] are the injunctions. While,

> One should not bring about confusion in the minds of the ignorant attached to action.[11]

These and others [similar] are the prohibitions.

Even those following the higher path (*uttarabhūmikādhirūḍhairapi*) should maintain the views of the lower and it is imperative that they not reveal their own opinions—this is the essence of what is meant [here at the outset of the text]. Therefore it is established that these injunctions and prohibitions apply even to those liberated while yet living (*jīvanmukta*) who travel on the path which transcends the three *guṇa*s [that permeate the material world].[12]

However, one's own views should be gradually revealed to those in whom the ripening of the mind is observed to be firm by their ritual practices (*karma*) in many [previous] births as prescribed in the initial (*pūrva*) [sections of the Vedas], but only after analyzing such persons carefully. Otherwise there is danger of breaking the tradition (*sampradāya*).

Those various levels (*bhūmikābheda*) leading up to the contemplative worship (*upāsti*) of [the goddess] Tripurasundarī I have presented in detail in my *Setubandha* commentary on the *Vāmakeśvaratantra*.[13]

In contrast, in the texts [espousing] contemplative worship (*upāsana*) priority is only on the deities; there is no priority on ritual actions (*karma*). Indeed, because there is no priority on ritual actions (*kriyā*), it is appropriate to say that Vedānta teaches that its essence is accomplished (*siddhavastubodhaka*) [through contemplative worship rather than through ritual action performed] towards the forms of the deities.[14]

There are three forms of deity: physical (*sthūla*), subtle (*sūkṣma*), and supreme (*parā*). Now the first [physical form of the deity] is described in its respective meditative verses (*dhyānaśloka*); the second [subtle form] consists of the [particular deity's] respective root-mantra (*mūlamantra*); the third [transcendent form] consists of contemplative worship (*upāsana*). Because deities are threefold in form, contemplative worship (*upāsti*) is divided threefold, respectively, into external sacrifice (*bahiryāga*) [performed to the physical form], silent repetition (*japa*) [on the subtle root-mantra], and internal sacrifice (*antaryāga*). All of these [three types of contemplative worship] are taught in the *Ṛg Veda* in the form of [this] great Upaniṣad beginning with the words, "The three cities" (*tisraḥ pura*) and ending with "Upaniṣad."

The import of the third and the tenth verses [of the text] makes evident that the intention of this Upanisad is to praise the supreme deity. In order to indicate the principle deity the first verse is spoken:[15]

[VERSE 1]

> She presides over the three cities and the three paths [and this *śrīcakra*] in which the syllables '*a*', '*ka*', and '*tha*' [representing the forty-eight letters of Sanskrit] are inscribed. [She is] the abode of all, deathless, ancient, great [and], the principal cause of the greatness of the gods.[16]
> *tisraḥ purastripathā viśvacarṣaṇī atrākathā akṣarā samniviṣṭā/*
> *adhiṣṭāyaināmajarā purāṇî mahattarā mahimā devatānāṃ//*

There are five types of liberation: [1] being in the same world (*sālokya*) is one; [2–4] proximity (*sāmīpya*), similarity in form (*sārūpya*), and union (*sāyujya*) [though] three [are taken as a single unit]; and [5] identity (*kaivalya*).[17] Among these [five] the first and the last are one path (*mārga*) and the middle group of three are another path.[18] Thus the *Taittirīya* [*śruti*] says:

> The learned one [who dies] when the sun is in the northern path, going to the splendor of the gods, obtains union (*sāyujya*) with Āditya; whoso [dies] when the sun is in the southern path,

> going to the splendor of the forefathers, obtains union (*sāyujya*) and being in the same world (*sālokya*) as the moon. These are the splendors of the sun and the moon. The learned brāhmaṇa is victorious [and rejects these two] and therefore obtains the splendor of Brahman, thus the splendor of Brahman.[19]

The idea is this: Yogis who withhold their semen (*ūrdhvaretasam*), performing ritual action according to their respective stage in life (*āśrama*), obtain the world of the moon in the form of being in the same world (*sālokyarūpa*) [with the deity]; those who perform contemplative worship (*upāsana*) holding a particular [deity] as one's own master obtain similarity in form (*sārūpya*) [with the deity]; those who perform contemplative worship on their own self-identity (*ahaṃgraha*) obtain union (*sāyujya*) [with the deity]. These three [forms of contemplative worship] are in the form of obtaining the sun (*āditya*). But those who possess knowledge of [the Absolute] Brahman in the form of a contemplative worship on the qualityless (*nirguṇopāsti*) [Absolute] obtain the abode (*pada*) of Brahman in the form of identity (*kaivalya*) [with Brahman]. In the second section of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* these three paths have been elaborated, beginning with the verse,

> North of the Agastya [asterism] and south of the Ajavīthī [asterism] is the path of the forefathers, just outside the path of Vaiśvānara.[20]

and ending with the verse,

> The seer with knowledge and discrimination goes to the supreme abode of Viṣṇu.[21]

Because the [soul traverses] three paths (*mārga*), the cities [mentioned in Verse 1] are understood to be three. Because [she] pervades the three cities, inhabits [them] or is in the form of them, the supreme deity is called Tripurā [that is, the Three Cities].[22]

> By knowledge of the Self (*ātman*), by inward [contemplative worship], by knowledge of the Mother, by meditation on the "I" and by devotional action (*karma*), a mortal obtains the place of identity (*kaivalya*).[23]

This fivefold division [of liberation] into three [paths] explains the atainment of the goddess.[24] Therefore she alone is [the One, the Absolute Brahman,] called the three cities [in Verse 1].[25] [And thus] she alone is the three paths: [that is, the compound in the verse is explained as a *bahuvrīhi*] she of whom there are three paths (*panthānaḥ*) [for obtaining liberation]. Since it is not in a dependent determinative compound (*tatpuruṣa*) [the word *tripathā*, "the three paths," as it is used in Verse 1] is not [taken to be] in the neuter gender [on the authority of Kātyāyana's *Vārttika* which states], "[the word] *patha* [ending with a *samāsānta* affix, see Pāṇini 2.4.17, is neuter] when compounded with a numeral or an *avyaya*, [as in the words *tripatham, supatham,* etc., but not so in *supantha* and *atipantha* where the *samāsānta* has not been added because of the prohibition stated in Pāṇini 5.4.69]."[26]

According to the Vedic etymologists the word *carṣaṇī* [as it occurs in Verse 1] means people.[27] The goddess alone is called *viśvacarṣiṇī* [literally, "the people of the universe"] [because] she is the one in whom all (*viśvā*), that is, the whole of the people (*carṣiṇī*) [or] creatures [find their existence]. This is as much as to say that she is the creator (*utpādika*) of the living world; or that she is all-seeing (*viśvadṛṣṭi*). This should be understood [in the context of the verse], "That One thought: 'Let me be many; let me propagate.' "[28] Thus the scripture (*śruti*) establishes that Brahman's initial [act of] seeing is omniscient [and] that [Brahman as it initially creates the universe] has the form of desire and the form of action.[29] In another scripture (*śruti*) [it says], "That desired, that performed auserity."[30] [And also,] "knowledge, strength, and action are inherent" is said in [yet another] scripture (*śruti*).[31] Even though the initial modification (*vṛtti*) is not different from the [Absolute] Brahman, it is said to have the form of knowledge (*jñāna*), desire (*icchā*), and action (*kṛti*).[32]

That [initial] modification [of the One into many] is [technically] called *śānta* [literally "peaceful"] because it is the aggregate form of desire, knowledge, and action.[33] [*Śānta* insofar as she is Brahman] is called transcendent (*parā*) because it is the aggregate form of [the four emanations of evolving primordial sound (*śabda*) technically called] *paśyantī, madhyamā,* and *vaikharī*.[34] She is called [by the name] *Ambikā* because she is the aggregate form of [the three consorts of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva and their respective powers, namely] *Vāmā, Jyeṣṭhā,* and *Raudrī*.[35] She in Her peaceful aspect is the deity of the [central point known as the] *baindava cakra* established in the [center of the] *śrīcakra*. In the *Nityāhṛdaya* and elsewhere it says that the supreme Brahman [insofar as it is],

> the *baindava cakra* [i.e., the central point or *bindu* of the *śrīcakra*] has the nature of the three Little Mothers (*mātṛkās*)

> [viz., the devolutions of the Absolute Brahman in the form of sound (*śabda*) known as *paśyantī, madhyamā,* and *vaikharī*] and it pervades the place of the universal waves [i.e., the world consisting of the thirty-six tattvas].[36]

And [it is] that [*baindava cakra*] alone which the three adjectives [given in Verse 1] indicate, beginning with [the words] "the three cities" [that is, *tisraḥ pura, pathā,* and *viśvacarṣiṇī*]. The [use of] plural and singular adjectives indicates that what is qualified is simultaneously a single and threefold form.

Brahma that is not different from liberation has also been discussed in the *Kālikāpurāṇa:*

> Her mandala consists of triangles (*trikoṇa*), the outer gates (*bhūpura*) consist of three lines; Her mantra also is said to consist of three syllables and similarly she has a threefold form.[37] *Kuṇḍalinī śakti* is threefold and there are three deities in creation. Because everything [that exists] is three, She is called Tripurā.

The description thus far having been from the point of view of the creation of objects (*artha*), from [the word] "where" (*yatra*) [onwards] she is described from the point of view of the creation of sounds (*śabda*). [The word] "where" [in the verse] means she in whom Tripurā [the goddess of the three cities, manifests herself] as the peaceful form [called] Ambikā, etc. "*Akathāḥ*" means the sixteen [vowels] beginning with [the letter] "*a*," the sixteen [consonants] beginning with "*ka*" [and the sixteen remaining consonants that] begin with "*tha*."[38] These are the "syllables" (*akṣara*) [referred to in the verse] and are "combined" [and thus are called] "*samniviṣṭā*" [or combined]. As the banyan tree is found in its seed, so these [syallables] contain everything and are complete.[39] The letter "*h*," because its original form (*svarūpa*) [originates in] the reflective aspect (*vimarśa*) [of the goddess rather than in the primary illuminative (*prakāśa*) aspect, as do the other letters,] is not counted separately [as a letter].[40] [This is] in accordance with the saying,

> The letter "*h*" is praised as having the form of *kalā* [in the scheme of the thirty-six categories (*tattvas*) that make up reality] and is described as *vimarśa*, reflection.[41]

The letter "*ḷ*" [the Vedic retroflex] is not different [for mantric purposes] from "*l*" [so it too is not counted separately]; and the letter "*kṣ*" is only a conjunction of the letters "*k*" and "*ṣ*" and is not independent [and thus not counted separately]. Therefore the *mātṛkā* letters [for the purposes of the mantraśāstra] number only forty-eight [not fifty-one].[42] And it further says in the *Sūtasaṃhitā,*

> I salute the supreme Kalā who is one, twofold, threefold and similarly sixteenfold, she who is divided into thirty-two [aspects].[43]

[She is] twofold by the division into vowels and consonants. The meaning is that the vowels are sixteen and the consonants thirty-two. [With respect to the grammatical construction of Verse 1 it should be noted that] in the two words starting with "*akṣarā*" [i.e., in *akṣarā samniviṣṭā,* there is the use of] the substitute *Ḍa* [i.e., the suffix *-a,* before which a stem drops its last vowel and any following consonants] in the place of *Jas* [i.e., the ending of the nominative plural] is Vedic.[44]

"Dwelling in" (*adhiṣṭāya*) means that the supreme deity who is worshipped (*upāsyam*) as presiding over that [*baindava cakra*] is the very form (*svarūpa*) of the bindu cakra [that is, center point of the *śrīcakra*] that is described in the first half [of the verse]. Regarding this [*bindu cakra*] there is a certain deity presiding over the three cities (*tripurā*) which is in the form of the *bindu* [in the center of the *śrīcakra*].[45] [The verb] "it is" (*asti*) is to be imported here in accordance with the dictum of Kātyāyana [in his *Vārttikas* on Pāṇini] which says, "After a third person noun even though '*asti*' or '*bhavati*' [meaning 'it is'] does not occur its [meaning] should be imported."[46] Or the continuative [form of the] verb (*lyapo'nvayaḥ*) is to be connected with the action prescribed in the later mantra.[47]

That goddess is [described in Verse 1 as] "without decay" (*ajarā*) [meaning She is] without death. "[The verbal root] √*jṝṣ* [i.e., √*jṛ* from which *ajarā* is derived] is used in the sense of diminishing age (*hāni*)," thus the word *hāni* [as it occurs in the *Dhātupāṭha* as shown here] precisely indicates the actual destruction of the life span [i.e., *jara* means "death," not merely "aging."][48]

"Ancient" (*purāṇī*) [in Verse 1 means] beginningless (*anādi*), [that is] one without birth. [She is called] *mahattarā,* [that is] supreme in all respects even among the known deities called Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva.[49] And [She is described further as one] who has that form of *mahimā,* that is, the greatness of those deities.[50] She alone is the primary cause (*nidānam*) of other deities' greatness, that is to say, [these deities] obtain greatness by worshipping (*upāsanayam*) Her.[51] In the *Tripurā Upaniṣad* and in all the Purāṇas and Tantras that follow that [Upaniṣad], the science (*vidyā*) of worshiping (*upāsita*) [the goddess] that is followed by Śiva, Viṣṇu, and others is variously described.[52]

> Śambhu worships (*pūjayate*) the goddess who is auspicious (*śubhā*) and possesses the power of the mantra (*mantraśaktimayī*).[53]

The different images (*ambāpratimābhedānām*) of the Mother which all the gods should worship (*pūjanīyānām*) are elaborated in detail in the *Padmapurāṇa* through stories such as this one. And similarly from the maxim, "A beggar does not beg from another beggar when someone who is not a beggar is also present," the implication is that with reference to the contemplative worship (*upāsti*) of other deities, the worship (*upāsti*) of the supreme goddess takes preference.[54] I have said [also in my] *Praise of the Supreme Śiva* (*Paraśivastava*),

> O Supreme Śiva, why should I, a beggar, beg from Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Indra, and other beggars, those who enjoy the mastery and wealth you have given, saying "do thou give me." Even an ignorant man who already enjoys the result of a twelve-days' sacrifice only desires the result of a *jyotiṣṭoma* [sacrifice, which is superior to a twelve-days' sacrifice] and not the result of a twelve-days' sacrifice.[55]

[The epithets in Verse 1 beginning with] "*ajarā*" ("deathless") indicate epithets of Brahmā the supreme deity presiding over the cycle (*cakra*) of Brahmās [who create the world anew at the beginning of each cosmic cycle]. The word "deity" (*devatā*) is in the feminine gender intending to indicate its signifying [the goddess].[56] Therefore in other scriptures (*śruti*) words such as *ajarā,* deathless, are used in the neuter gender [rather than in the feminine as is here the case]. Similarly the followers of the *Ātharvaṇī* school say,

> The unassailable city of the gods has eight *cakra*s and nine doors, Her golden sheath is the heavenly world surrounded by light.
>
> In that threefold golden sheath established in three ways, the Knowers of Brahman know that in that [golden sheath] is possessed the worshipful Self.[57]

The sense of the verse is that above the eight *cakra*s beginning with [the outermost] *bhūpura* [forming the three-lined gateway of the *śrīcakra*] and ending with the *trikoṇa* [the innermost triangle] is a sheath surrounding the *bindu* with its three forms [that is, the *bindu* as expanded into the *trikoṇa*]. In this [*bindu*] the Great Being is present [though it is not visible by virtue of the sheath]. "*Yakṣa*" [the Great Being] indicates then that it is ineligible [therefore] for external worship (*bahirpūjā*) [because of the reason just stated]. Only the knowers of Brahman know that [the *bindu*] is identical with the supreme goddess and only within themselves. Others do not [know this]. This has been discussed in detail in the *Setubandha* [my commentary on the *Vāmakeśvaratantra*].[58]

Thus having discussed the *bindu cakra,* the second verse, beginning with the words, "the nine *Yonis*," is pronounced in order to indicate the *cakra* whose nature is the nine *Yonis* and whose form is an aggregate of the [inner triangle of the *śrīcakra* known as the] *trikoṇa* and the [sub-cakra consisting of eight minor triangles called the] *vasukoṇa*.[59]

> The nine *cakras* created the nine *Yonis*; joined together [to form these] nine [*cakras*, there are] nine *yoginīs* [presiding over each of the *cakras*]. [Verse 2]
>
> [There are also] presiding female deities over [each of the] nine *cakras*. *Syonā* [the goddess presiding over the *cakras* is the cause of happiness]. There are nine gestures (*mudrās*) and nine *bhadrās* for each place (*mahīnām*) on the *cakra*.[60]
>
> *navayonī navacakrāṇi dīdhire navaiva yogā navayoginīścal navānāṃ*
> *cakre adhināthāḥ syonā navamudrā navabhadrā mahīnāṃ//*

Even though the *bindu cakra* [in the center of the *śrīcakra,* is only one point] because it has a threefold nature, each respectively took on three forms.[61] [The verb *dīdhire* as it occurs in Verse 2 is explained:] This is a form of the Vedic root √*dīdhī,* "to shine, to play."[62] *Dīpanam,* [the act of] shining, [which is the meaning of the verbal root *dīdhire*] means illumination (*prakāśa*) but in this context the meaning intended is creating (*utpādanam*).[63] The three deities created [and] not different from [her supreme] peaceful (*śānta*) [aspect] are [the three powers (*śaktis*) of creation, namely,] *Icchāśakti* [the power of desire], *Jñānaśakti* [the power of knowledge], and *Kriyāśakti* [the power of action]. The female deities (*śakti*) named *Vāmā, Jyeṣṭhā,* and *Raudrī* [identified with the *Icchā-, Kriyā-,* and *Jñāna-śaktis* are complemented] by the three [corresponding male] forms Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Rudra which are not different creations from [her supreme, subsuming aspect called] *Ambikā.* The [corresponding] deities of speech (*vāgdevatā*) called *Paśyantī, Madhyamā,* and *Vaikharī* are [also] not different creations from [her final aspect as "sound" called] the supreme (*parā*). This is the meaning [of the threefold nature of the *bindu cakra* divided respectively in three ways].[64]

Alternatively [the construction is that it was] only the supreme goddess, presiding over the three cities, who created the nine *Yoni*s.[65] There is a suggestion of latent mental impressions by which these nine deities alone have been transformed into the nine *Yoni*s [and] *cakra*s.

Furthermore, the nine *cakra*s [forming the sub-*cakra*s of the *śrīcakra*], beginning with [the outermost called] *trailokyamohana,* exist in the nine *Yoni*s as latent mental impressions (*saṃskārātmana*); some of these [latent impressions] already exist, others are still potential. This is what he says: [In Verse 2] the nine *cakra*s (*navacakrāni*) as the agents [of creation] illuminated the nine *Yoni*s (*navayonīr dīdhire*) [that is, they] created the nine *Yoni*s. The nine *Yoni cakra*s [if taken in the sense of being the central *trikoṇa* plus the minor eight triangles of the *vasukoṇa cakra*] arise [from the intersection of] the two [major] Śakti triangles with one [major] *Vahni* [or Śiva] triangle.[66] The three lines of each [major] triangle so joined together are the nine lines and [produce by their intersection] the forms of angles [which number] precisely nine.[67] Therefore, [the nine *Yoni*s] produced the nine *yoginī*s [identified respectively with each of the eight minor triangles which comprise the *vasukoṇa* sub-*cakra* and the inner triangle sub-*cakra* called *trikoṇa*]. The idea here is that in these nine [sub-] *cakra*s [composed of the eight *vasukoṇa* triangles plus the one inner *trikoṇa*] the nine [sets of] *yoginī*s beginning with *prakaṭa* [that is, all the *yoginī*s of the *śrīcakra*] are [present] and that these [sets of *yoginī*s] are present here in the form of angles.[68]

> Above that [space and time] is the supreme, the great, not different from space and time.[69]

Sayings such as this [suggest] the conventional method of expressing the expansion (*prapañca*) [of the *śrīcakra* described as] beginning with the *bindu cakra* and [inasmuch as it is] not distinct from space, etc., [ultimately, nor] below [the level] of Brahman.[70] Based on this [view of the expanding *bindu cakra*] is the extended [three-dimensional figure] of the *Meru* [*śrīcakra*]. Therefore in this one [*Meru*] *cakra,* beginning with [the outermost sub-*cakra,* the] *bhūpura* and ending with the *bindu,* are nine levels (*bhūmikā*), one above the other.[71]

Presiding over these [nine levels are the deities] called *Tripurācakreśvarī* [that is, the goddesses of the *cakra* of the Three Cities who are] exactly nine [in number].[72] Those [nine presiding deities] in their subtle forms are established respectively in the nine *Yoni*s; and the presiding female deities (*adhinātha*) over the places (*mahīnām*) on the nine *cakras* are the agents (*kartyaḥ*) that created (*dīdhire*) the nine *Yonis* [as it is stated in Verse 2].

Syonā is an epithet of the goddess of the [*śrī-*] *cakra*. The meaning is that [she] is the cause of happiness (*sukha*) [this being, according to oral traditions, a Vedic interpretation of the word].[73]

The nine gestures (*mudrās*) [each associated with the *śrīcakra*'s nine sub-*cakras* respectively] begin with [the one called] *sarvasaṃkṣobhiṇī* and end with *sarvayoni*.[74] These are also established here [in Verse 2]. The nine auspicious ones (*bhadrās*) [subsequently mentioned in the verse] are elaborated in the [*Vāmakeśvara*] *Tantra* as,

> *Dharma, adharma,* and the Souls; that which measures, what is measured, and also the measure.[75]

The meaning is [that these] nine [*mudrās* indicate respectively] merit, sin, the Self (*ātman*), the inner Self (*antarātman*), the supreme Self (*paramātman*), the knowledge Self (*jñānātman*), the measurer (*pramātā*), the measured (*prameya*), and the measure (*pramā*). [Elsewhere] this has been elaborated:

> The *cakra* is ninefold and the *cakras* are divided ninefold.[76]

Or [one can take] the word "auspicious" (*bhadrā*) [as it occurs in Verse 2] to mean the mantras. Some say they [i.e., the nine *bhadrās*] refer to the mantras of the goddesses presiding over the nine *cakras*.[77] Because they are present [in the *śrīcakra pūjā*] it is appropriate to consider [the nine *bhadrās* as actually a reference to] the mantras of the [nine] gestures (*mudrās*).

The essence of the matter is that the whole *śrīcakra* in its subtle form is indeed present from [the perspective of] the "dissolution *cakra*" [i.e., the *śrīcakra* analyzed from the *bindu* outwards] when the threefold form of the *cakra* consists of the [central] *bindu,* the [innermost central triangle called the] *trikoṇa,* and the [inner eight minor triangles constituting] the *vasukoṇa cakras*.[78] An injunction in the Tantras states that in an emergency (*āpatkālika*) the summarized form of the [*śrīcakra*] *pūjā* may begin with the *vasukoṇa* [*cakra* consisting of the eight minor triangles and proceed up] to the *bindu* [in the center of the *śrīcakra*].[79] This is the scriptural authority (*śruti*) for that [method of performing the *pūjā*]. Here all the supporting references mentioned in the Tantras and Purāṇas are not stated for fear of [unnecessarily] expanding [this commentary].[80]

Now the third verse beginning with the words, “She is one” is spoken in order to indicate the [*śrī*-] *cakra* [as] established in the form of two sets of ten triangles and the *manvaśra* [*cakra,* that is, the sub-*cakra* consisting of fourteen minor triangles].

[VERSE 3]

> Originally she was one, she became nine, she became nineteen and then twenty-nine. Then [she became] forty-three. [She is] shining intensely, as if desirous. Let the Mothers [identified with the forty-three *yoginī*s placed on the minor triangles of the *śrīcakra*] enter into me [through the process of *nyāsa* and mantras].[81]
> *ekā sā āsīt prathamā sā navāsīdāsonaviṃśadāsonatriṃśat/ catvāriṃśadatha tisraḥ samidhā uśatīrva mātaromā viśantu//*

The nine *Yonis* [consist of the] five subtle elements (*sūkṣmabhūta*) and five physical elements (*sthūlabhūta*); thus there are ten elements.[82] The ten essences (*tanmātra*s) beginning with sound arise by dividing these physical and subtle [elements]. And from these [ten essences] arose the fourteen, namely, the five organs of action, the five organs of knowledge, and the four inner organs.[83] All these deities have feminine forms in the form of *Yonis* (literally, wombs) [meaning having the shape of triangles within the *śrīcakra*]. All this has been elaborated in the Tantra beginning with the verse:

> The two sets of ten [minor] triangles [within the *śrīcakra*] have a shining form (*sphuradrūpa*) which depends upon illumination (*prakāśa*) [of the] ten elements and the ten essences.[84]

The same process [of interidentification between the *Yonis* and other aspects] as in the earlier case [of Verse 2] is also taught here [in Verse 3].

[In Verse 3] She who is [called] the first (*prathamā*) is the deity who is the cause of the whole universe. She was before [creation] in the singular form of the *bindu cakra* [of the *śrīcakra*]; then She became nine [as the verse says] having the nature (*ātmanā*) of nine *Yonis*. Then [as it is said in Verse 3] She became nineteen in the form of the nine *Yonis* [identified with the one inner *trikoṇa* triangle plus the eight minor triangles of the *vasukoṇa*] and the ten inner *Yonis* [of the inner ten minor triangles].

The [grammatical] forms of *viṃśat,* etc., [literally meaning twenty, etc., as they occur in the Verse] are Vedic.

Then [Verse 3 states] she became twenty-nine by adding the outer ten *Yoni*s [identified with the outer ten minor triangles within the *śrīcakra*]. She then became forty-three [by adding to twenty-nine] the fourteen [minor triangles] previously [mentioned above]. The meaning is that the goddess took as her own form the forty-three *Yoni*s [identified with the forty-three minor triangles within the *śrīcakra*].[85] Because the *bindu cakra* is formless, when it is said "She is one," [the *bindu cakra*] is not counted among the [forty-three] *yoginī*s [identified with the forty-three minor triangles of the *śrīcakra*].[86] [The word] shining (*samidhā*) meaning shining intensely (*dedīpyamānā*) refers to these [forty-three *yoginī*s identified with the] Mothers. [When the Verse says] "Let them enter into me" the prayer of the poet [author] is "Let them enter into my body because it is of the form of the *śrīcakra*."[87]

[When Verse 3 says] "as if desiring" (*uśatīva*) it means "as it were desirous of" (*kāmayamānā iva*) but in fact she is without desire (*niṣkāmatvāt*). Just as cows desiring to be near their calves enter quickly into the cowshed, so let these [Mothers (*mātarāḥ*), that is, the forty-three *yoginī*s] enter [into me]: this is the meaning.[88] This scripture (*śruti*) alone [as stated in Verse 3, "Let the Mothers enter into me"] is the source (*mūlam*) for the injunctions concerning the *nyāsa* of the [*śrī-*] *cakra* as established in the Tantras.[89] Because of the necessity to identify these [forty-three] female deities on the [various parts of the] body [through the process of *nyāsa*], it is said,

> Let all those *yoginī*s make my body their home.[90]

This statement is the source [for the interidentification between the body and the *śrīcakra*] described as locating the goddess (*śaktinyāsa*) [in the body] and based upon the form of a mantra.

Now in order to indicate the two [sets of] lotus [petals] encircled by three lines on the remaining portion of the [*śrī-*] *cakra* [as it is viewed from the perspective] of creation, the fourth verse is spoken.

> [There is] an upward rising flame in the midst of a circle of light which is [also] darkness itself. There is a horizontal [circle of] light that is red and is without decay. [VERSE 4]
>
> [She is] joy [and the] bliss [of purity] and indeed these [three] circles of radiating light [surrounding the sets of lotus petals of the *śrīcakra*] make auspicious [the Mothers identified with it].[91]
>
> *ūrdhvajvalanajyotiragre tamo vai tiraścīnamajaram tadrajo'bhūt/*
> *ānandanaṃ modanaṃ jyotirindoretā u vai maṇḍalā maṇḍayanti//*

Below the [sub-*cakra*] of fourteen [minor triangles] there are two [sub-] *cakra*s of eight and sixteen lotus petals [surrounding the *Meru śrīcakra*]. In between each is a circle and outside [the sixteen petals] is [another] circle; thus [there are] three circles. This is the conclusion reached in some Tantras.[92] Hence [there is the verse]:

> The four gateways (*catuṣkoṇa*) have the form of Jyeṣṭhā and the three circles the form of Vāmā.[93]

Thus the ancient teachers' explanation of the words "the three circles" defined as two lotus [petal *cakra*s] surrounded by three circles between them is appropriate.[94]

> The two groups of lotus petals surrounded by three circles have the nature of Agni and Soma according to the Śāktas, My Beloved.[95]

The explanation [given above for the four gateways and the three circles] is the same for this verse. "These three circles have the threefold form: the form of Agni, Sūrya, and Soma": This explanation should be understood to mean that between two [sets of] lotus [petals are the three circles].[96] Literally, however, the meaning is that surrounding the *cakra*s, outside of the "maintaining *cakra*" [i.e., the final set of fourteen minor triangles], is a circle of light called *jvalana,* flame, [and this flame] whose nature is darkness [is described in Verse 4 as] "darkness itself" (*tamo vai*). An "upward rising flame" (*ūrdhvajvalat*) affirms its form is a flame of fire (*agnijvālārūpatva*). And the appearance of soot [at] the top of the flame further affirms that it has the form of darkness (*tamorūpatva*).[97] Hence [the author] uses the indeclinable particle *vai,* [meaning in this case] itself (*eva*), in order to avoid any doubt concerning the mention of darkness as incongruous with [the flame's] composition as light.[98]

Following this [remark and in order to differentiate the sun's form (*sūryarūpa*) of light from the light of a flame, there is mentioned] a horizontal (*tiraścīnam*) circle of light moving horizontally. Because of its red color, it has an active quality (*raktatvād rajoguṇamabhūt*) [rather than that of "darkness" (*tamoguṇa*) like the vertical flame] and that [circle of horizontal light] has the form of the sun. It is a matter of [ordinary] perception that sunlight travels horizontally and fire vertically.[99] It has been eloquently said:

> It is well known that the sun's light (*anūrusāratheḥ*) disperses horizontally and fire moves vertically.[100]

The epithet "without decay" (*ajaram*) [used in Verse 4 to indicate the *agnirūpa* or form of fire] affirms the peculiar nature of a flame of fire.[101]

Following this [the word] pleasure [or *modana* occurs in the Verse to indicate the form of the moon (*somarūpa*)] arising from the contact of subject with object; [this pleasure] occurs [in the form of] the circle of light around the moon. The word "bliss" (*ānanda*) is spoken [to indicate pleasure's] pure quality (*sattvaguṇa*). [These specific usages] suggest [not ordinary pleasure but] the bliss of Brahman since there is an excess of purity.

The [particles] "*u*" and "*vai*" indicate a gentle address (*komalāmantrane*) and add emphasis.

Thus the three *maṇḍalas* or circles (*vṛttāni*) [that surround parts of the *śrīcakra*] make it auspicious, that is, [as the Verse says] they ornament (*maṇḍayanti*) the Mothers [who are identified on the various triangles of the *śrīcakra*].

The meaning [of the whole passage] is that a *śrīcakra* fit for worship (*kāryakṣama*) should consist of the two sets of lotus petals between which are the three circles, [and should] not merely be [a *śrīcakra* consisting of the major and minor triangles beginning with the *bindu*] up to the *manvaśra* [*cakra* of fourteen minor triangles]. The sense is [also] that the worship (*pūjā*) done from the *manvaśra* [*cakra*] up to the *bindu* is only for emergencies.

In order to teach the nature of the nine gateways of the [*śrī-*] *cakra* the fifth verse is spoken.

> [The *śrīcakra* is composed also of] the three lines of the outer gateways; it is the three worlds, [has the form of] the three qualities and the three illuminations. [VERSE 5]
>
> This is the city [of the goddess]. It increases the fulfillment of those [devotees seeking] fulfillment. It is Śiva (*Madana*) and the goddess [as *Madanyā*].
>
> *tisraśca rekhāḥ sadanāni bhūmestriviṣṭapāstriguṇāstriprakāśāḥ/*
> *etat puram pūrakam pūrakāṇāmatra prathete madano madanyā//*

In other Tantras the three circles are prescribed to be exterior to the two [sets of] lotus petals surrounded by two circles.[102] If that is the case then one should interpret the verse up to the words "And three lines" (*tisraś ca rekhā*) as referring to the three circles. And thus one can't say that it is incongruous to mention the three circles as being outside the two circles [that surround the outermost set of lotus petals]. *Tantrarāja* [*Tantra*], taking scriptural statements (*śruti*) for its source, states that outside the *manvaśra* [sub-*cakra* of fourteen minor triangles] there is another bordering circle different from the circle surrounding the eight-petalled lotus.[103] To take the three lines [mentioned here in Verse 5] as referring to "the outermost gateways" [subsequently mentioned] is the natural meaning.[104]

[The] "three worlds" (*triviṣṭapā*) means having the form of the three worlds (*bhūvanatrayarūpa*).[105] Or [*viṣṭapā*, world] may mean having the form of heaven (*svargarūpa*) because it is the abode of the gods. The "three qualities" (*triguṇa*) means having the form of the three qualities. "Three illuminations" (*triprakāśā*) means the light in the form of three circles representing the sun (*sūrya),* the moon (*candra*), and fire (*agni*). The word "this" [in the Verse] concludes the discussion of the *śrīcakra.*

These four and a half verses describe the city, like that city of the goddess (*śrīpura*) which is [identified as] the *śrīcakra,* the dwelling place of the supreme goddess together with her attendants. [The *śrīcakra*] fulfills the wishes of the devotees and even the gods like Śiva, Viṣṇu, and others. Hence the meaning is that on the *śrīcakra* are *Madana* [as He is called in Verse 5], who is Śiva or *Kāmeśvara,* and *Madanyā* [as she is called in the Verse], who is *Śivakāmasundarī* [the goddess consort of the dancing Śiva *Naṭarāja*]. They are present, shining by their own luster, in the extended forms [of the powers] of *aṇima,* etc.[106]

Or ["*madanyā*"] can be split as "*madanī*" plus "*ā*." The long *ī* [vowel in the] final [position] is added to [some] masculine words; thus it should be construed as *āprathete*. This follows from [Pāṇini's rules].[107] In the Vedas these *gati*s and *upasarga*s (preverbs) are employed indifferently after the verbal root as well as before it, and are also seen separated from the verb by intervening words.

In order to indicate that the different names occuring in various places in the Purāṇas and Tantras all describe the goddess's forms, the sixth verse beginning with the words, "*mandantikā,*" etc., is spoken.[108]

[VERSE 6]

> [The goddess] is differently known as the Joyous, the Proud,
> the Ausipcious, and the Prosperous. And she is the Beautiful
> and the Pure One; the Modest, the Intelligent, the Satisfied,
> the Desired, the Thriving, the Wealthy, Lalitā [the Lovely].
> *madantikā māninī maṅgalā ca subhagā ca sā sundarī śuddhamattā/*
> *lajjā matistuṣṭiriṣṭā ca puṣṭā lakṣmīrumā lalitā lālapantī//*

The *Padmapurāṇa* in the context of enumerating the places of pilgrimage of the goddess (*devītīrtha*) mentions some [of her] forms:

> Devī is Lalitā in Prayāg; in Laṇkā She is called Maṇgalā; in Trikūṭi Bhadrasundarī. In Karavīra She is Mahālakṣmi; similarly in Vināyaka She is Devī; in Devadaruvana She is Puṣṭi, in Kashmir region She is Medhā while in Vateśvara She is Tuṣṭi.[109]

These and other forms are to be found in various places.

The fourteen names [listed in Verse 6] beginning with *Mandantikā* are inclusive of *Viśālākṣī* [the goddess] in Kāśī and other deities. Whatever form of a particular goddess appears, even if it is differently known, is in reality only she [the supreme Śakti].

The word *lālapantī* [as it occurs in Verse 6] is a synonym of *lālapyamāna,* [that is,] "differently known."[110] The usage is seen in the *Śābarabhāṣya* [on the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra*s] where it says, "A case ending added to a word not yet declined has the meaning of the yet to be declined word in special instances."[111] Otherwise [if *lālapantī* is read as a substantive rather than as a verb] these fifteen goddesses correspond to the fifteen syllables [of the *śrīvidyā* mantra]. The Ātharvaṇa school reads here "*siddhimattā*" for "*śuddhamattā*."[112]

The seventh verse is spoken in order to effect the contemplative worship of the extolled goddess.

> Knowing this [supreme goddess] as [residing within the] very seat [of the body, i.e., the *śrīcakra*] they [that is, her attendants,] please [her] being intoxicated with ambrosial wine [drunk during worship]. [Verse 7]
>
> [Her devotees are established] on the outskirts of the great heaven and enter into the supreme abode of the Three Cities.
>
> *imāṃ vijñāya sudhayā madanti parisrutā tarpayantaḥ svapīṭhaṃ/*
> *nākasya pṛṣṭe mahato vasanti parandhāma traipuram cāviśanti//*

"This" (f.) [in Verse 7] means the supreme deity. "Knowing" (*vijñāya*) means knowing (*jñātva*) preceded by the special injunctions, that is, making [her] one's own by the contemplative worship (*upāsti*) which is preceded by initiation (*dīkṣā*), service to the teacher, etc. "One's own seat" (*svapīṭha*) means the *śrīcakra* which is not different from one's own body. There resides [in the body] the goddess with her attendants "flowing with nectar" (*sudhayā parisrutā*), that is, with the substances made like ambrosia [by showing the *dhenamudrā* at the time of the food offering (*naivedya*) during the *śrīcakra pūjā*].[113]

[The word] pleasing (*tarpayanta*) refers to those performing worship (*pūjayantaḥ*) with offerings (*upacāraiḥ*) such as liquid oblations (*tarpaṇādi*), etc.; "they enjoy" (*madanti*) means they enjoy (*bhajanti*) the conceptionless object as the one object identified with one's own Self, preceded by the enjoyment of contemplating objects.[114] The meaning [of the second line of the Verse] is that those [who enjoy their own Self as conceptionless] dwell on the outskirts of the great heaven and enter into the supreme abode called *Traipura.* Here [the notion of] making ambrosial [substances used in the ritual] is indicative of other ritual performances [such as the showing of *mudrās* during the *pūjā*].[115] Thus that ambrosial goddess (*sudhādevī*) is one's own personal deity (*abhimānadevatā*) and is understood as symbolized in the letters of the mantra of the ritual [which transforms the ordinary substance into ambrosia].[116] In the *Rudrayāmala* it is said:

> Purification is by the ritual mantra (*mantrasaṃskāra*) and that alone is called ambrosia (*amṛta*).[117]

"Dwelling on the outskirts of the great heaven" indicates achieving the fruits of the three human aims [in life, namely, *dharma, artha,* and *kāma*]. Tripurā's supreme abode [called in this Verse *traipura*] actually indicates liberation (*mokṣa*) itself. The sense is that [*upāsakas*] obtain liberation as well as all [worldly] desires. In the *Devībhāgavatasmṛti* it says,

> It is said that, "Thus Śakti is omnipresent, she is Brahman." The wise have spoken of Her as twofold, "[She is] with qualities and without qualities." Those with desires should worship (*pūjyā*) her with qualities but those devoid of desire as without qualities. She, the Faultless One, is the Governess over *dharma, artha, kāma,* and liberation. Or [it can be said] having been worshiped preceded by the appropriate injunctions, she gives all desired aims.[118]

The end result is an injunction of one productive operation (*bhāvanā*) qualified by another [productive operation rather than separate injunctions of two operations, following the doctrine laid down in the *revatī* section, *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* 2.2, *adhikaraṇa* 12], namely, that one who is initiated into the *śrīvidyā* should bring about [this being the primary operation] all his desires by means of the conceptionless state of mind through a worshiping [this being the qualifying operation] of his own body involving substances.[119] In every instance it is this very passage of scripture (*śruti*) that is the foundation for the qualifying injunctions found in the [*Paraśurāma-*] *Kalpasūtra* etc., such as, "an intelligent person is to be initiated."[120] In "Knowing, they please," the act of gratifying (*tarpaṇa*), even though directly stated in the text (*śruta*), is connected [with the principal injunction not as the principal goal itself but simply] as a cause of the operation productive of the [principal] fruit], just as in the statement "Giving gold, they enjoy immortality," [the giving of gold is not the principal operation enjoined, but rather qualifies that operation by specifying who is entitled to undertake it]. There is nothing ruling out an injunction here even though this is a declarative statement (*mantratve'pi*) [and should therefore be expected to present an *arthavāda* rather than a *vidhi*], because there is the enjoining of something otherwise not conveyed and there is no obstructing of the denotative force of the injunction, [and] because one often accepts declarative statements (*mantra*) as injunctive, such as [in the statement] "One should sacrifice partridges for spring" or "the able should be led to help the needy" [or] "those who know a face (*asya*) have discriminating minds."[121] Actually the real cause (of the production of the principal fruit] is the meaning of the verbal root √*mad* in "*madanti,*" which expresses a particular state of mind having as its object the pure Self which is undifferentiated from the goddess [identified as] consciousness, by means of fabricating subjunctive endings for it using the principle set forth in the *bhāvārtha* section [of *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* 2.1.1], as in the statement beginning *yad āgneyo* [in which the indicative verb *bhavati* is interpreted as having a subjunctive force].[122] And that it is to be referred to by the word internal sacrifice (*antaryāga*) follows from the fact that the verbal root √*yaj* [meaning, "to offer sacrifice"] denotes a particular mental state. But the *parisrutā* ("with flowing [ambrosia]") is construed with the meaning of the verbal root √*mad* by a transference of meaning involving possession [i.e., it should be interpreted as meaning "with an action involving flowing ambrosia," and thus referring to the action that possesses the ambrosia rather than to the ambrosia itself].[123] Or [preferably, one may achieve a less drastic solution by saying that] both of the things involved [as qualifiers] in the [principal] productive operation have their connection [with it] as accompaniments (*pārṣṭiko 'nvayaḥ*) in accordance with the principle of the red yearling [in the statement "one should buy the soma with a red year-old cow," *TS* 6.1.6, as explained in the *aruṇā adhikaraṇa* of *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* 3.1].[124] "On the outskirts of heaven," etc., establishes [the fruit] to be produced, as in the statement *pratitiṣṭanti* [i.e., *pratitiṣṭanti ha vai ya etā rātrīr upayanti,* "They abide, who perform sacrifice on these nights," where the fruit of sacrifice, unexpressed in the injunction itself, is drawn from the reference to abiding in the *arthavāda,* giving rise to the principle called *rātrisatra-nyāya,* as set forth in the *rātrisatra* section, *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* 4.3 *adhikaraṇa* 8]. Because of the statement of a collection of fruits through the word "and" (*ca*) [in the second half of the verse] there are [several fruits, the desires for which constitute] several qualifications [for undertaking the enjoined activity] that are interdependently chained together, as in the statement "One who is pure becomes radiant," etc., [where a whole string of fruits is mentioned]. To put it plainly, several of the aims of human life are simultaneously the fruit, rather than any one of them being available as the sufficient fruit to the exclusion of the others, as in the statement "for all desires" [in which any one desire could be chosen as the sufficient fruit and all other desires could be ignored].[125] But the action of gratifying is subordinate, by the principle that in the presence of that which effects the fruit that which does not effect the fruit is subordinate [*phalavatsamnidhau aphalam aṅgam,* as laid down in *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* 4.4.11.34]. The quality of being a knower expressed in the phrase "knowing her" is a property delimiting the generic character of being qualified [to undertake the enjoined action]. This is why the statement in the *Samayācārasmṛti* applies:

> Twice-born persons without initiation into the tradition (*kula*) are not qualified.[126]

By the [use of the] present participle in "pleasing" (*tarpayanta*) here in this verse and by the present participle and gerundive form in "offering food, taking for oneself" (*nivedayan svātmikṛtya*) in the injunction of the external sacrifice that is to be stated [in Verse 12], because they express the simultaneity of the offering to the deity and the taking for oneself, the scripture (*śruti*) is intended only to an enjoining of the offering to the deity (*divyapāna*) and not to an enjoining of the offering for oneself (*vīrapāna*). Therefore,

> Drinking is said to be threefold: divine, heroic, and ordinary. Divine is the drinking [done ritually] in front of the goddess, heroic [drinking] is performed [ritually at the end of the *pūjā* when you have dismissed the goddess] from the place of worship.[127]

For this recollection (*smṛti*) one must seek another [collaborating] revelation (*śruti*). But [prohibitions applying to] the four human aims [i.e., to the ordinary life] since they have for their object only what is arrived at through passion (*rāga*) do not operate at all with respect to the prescriptions of ritual sacrifice. Because,

> By whatever means the intellect (*citta*) can be identified with Śiva, so by any means the mind (*manas*) should be identified with Kṛṣṇa.[128]

By verses like these found in the Purāṇas the intention is only with this thought in mind. From many sources such as these comes the clear mention of the injunctions [of the *śrīcakra pūjā*] as referring to all castes (*sarvavarṇa*) in ritual matters. What is pointed out (*iti dik*) [but not elaborated upon here] is that with reference to these many statements [concerning the applicability of injunctions] there is no scope for a discussion of the strengths or weaknesses of the injunctions. This is due to the fact that [such passages of recollected scripture (*smṛti*)] are based on the unanimous and obvious revealed scriptures (*śruti*).

Thus having prescribed the contemplative worship (*upāsti*) of the supreme form, the eighth verse is spoken with the desire to indicate the worship of the goddess's subtle form (*sūkṣmarūpa*).[129]

[Verse 8]

> [The *śrīvidyā* mantra is revealed esoterically through the words] Desire, womb, lotus, wielder of the thunderbolt, cave, [followed by the letters] "ha" [and] "sa," the wind, cloud, and Indra [lord of the gods].
>
> Again [within the mantra occurs the syllable indicated by] cave [then] "sa," "ka" [and] "la" and Māyā—this is the Primordial Mantra [or Original Knowledge], Mother of the Universe, the Ancient.
>
> *kāmo yoniḥ kamalā vajrapāṇirguhā hasā mātariśvā'bhramindraḥ/*
> *punarguhā sakalā māyayā ca purūcyeṣā viśvamātā'dividyā//*

Here the fifteen-lettered mantra [i.e., the *śrīvidyā]* is revealed (*uddhriyate*). That [mantra] is described by the term knowledge (*vidyā*) because it has a feminine gender [as does *vidyā*] and the form of consciousness (*cidrūpa*).

In some places the *gāyatrī* [mantra], the mother of the Vedas, is recited out loud even though it is the same [from the esoteric point of view as the *śrīvidyā* mantra and thus secret and not usually revealed].[130] And her [mantra] some instruct by words other than the explicit syllables in order to convey the mantra's deep secrecy (*atirahasyatvam*). Through this it is suggested that the qualified person and their actions are likewise [kept secret]. In the *Tripurātāpinī* [*Upaniṣad*] it has been clearly stated that the *gāyatrī* [mantra] designates the original knowledge [or mantra, *ādividyā*] so why elaborate [unnecessarily here]? Even the first verse of the [*Devī-*] *Bhāgavata* supports this:

> I praise the original knowledge whose form is omniscience,
> let [it] instill our minds.[131]

Because this mantra is deeply secret it should be learned only at the feet of a teacher.

[The words] *mātariśva* and *kāma* [as they occur in Verse 8] indicate the syllables of the Four-Faced One (*caturmukhavācakāmakṣaram*) [i.e., the god Brahmā].[132] [The words] *kamalā* and *yoni* [indicate] the fourth and eleventh vowels [i.e., the long "*ī*" and "*e*" as they are contained in the mantra].[133] [The words] *indra* and *vajrapāṇi* [represent] the third of the semivowels [i.e., "*la*"].[134] [The words] *guhā* and *māyā* [represent] the seed [syllable] of [the goddess] Bhuvaneśvarī [i.e., *hrīm*]. [The word] *abhra* [represents] the letter "*ha*" [which is also] the first letter of the previous [seed syllable (*bījākṣara*) of Bhuvaneśvarī]. The remaining five [syllables of the mantra] are in their own [explicit] form [rather than represented by another esoteric term].

This original knowledge [or primordial mantra] is [called in Verse 8] *purūcī* [meaning] ancient (*purātanī*).[135] Mother of the Universe (*viśvamātā*) [as it occurs in the Verse] means the creator of the world (*jagajjanayitrī*). The *Yoginīhṛdaya*'s section on traditional meaning (*sampradāyārtha*) elaborates in detail the creation of the world by the syllables of [this *śrīvidyā*] mantra (*vidyā*).[136] But the mantra's meaning has been variously explained in different Tantras according to the various [twelve forms it takes as revealed through the twelve sages and demigods] beginning with Agastya, Dattātreya, etc. And [the form and meaning of] the mantra grasped according to my own interpretation has been presented in the *Varivasyārahasya* and so should be understood [as I presented it there].[137]

In order to indicate the mantra (*vidyā*) of the contemplative worship (*upāsitam*) of [the followers of] Lopāmudrā and the mantra worship of [the followers of] Kāmarāja, the ninth verse is spoken.

[VERSE 9]

> Setting down [in place of] the three root [syllables of each *kūṭa*] of this [Kāmarāja *kādividyā* mantra as described in the previous verse] the letters *ha, sa,* and *ka* represented by the words] six, seven, and fire (*vahni* or Śiva) [form the Lopāmudrā vidyā].

> Praising the Lord, Desire, the Imagined, the [One] Explained [in the Vedas], they enjoy immortality.
> *ṣaṣṭam saptamamatha vahnisārathimasyā mūlatrikamāveśayantaḥ/ kathyaṃ kaviṃ kalpakaṃ kāmamīśaṃ tuṣṭu vāṃso amṛtatvam bhajante//*

"Of this" (f.) (*asyā*) [as it occurs in Verse 9] means "of this mantra" (*vidyā*). "The three root [syllables]" (*mūlatrikam*) means the three [first] syllables of the first [*kūṭa* or line of the mantra].[138] [The word] "removing" (*unmūlya*) is to be supplied [after these words]. In place of [the first three syllables of the *kādividyā*] by substituting the three letters beginning with the sixth [syllable of the *kādividyā*], those doing silent repetition (*japaka*) by either of [these] two mantras [that is, either the Kāmarāja *vidyā* of Verse 8 or the Lopāmudrā *vidyā* of Verse 9] have praised the supreme Śiva whose nature is pure [i.e., in the bodily *saguṇa* form].[139]

[The word] *tuṣṭuvāṃsaḥ* (literally, "those who have praised") means praising, that is, doing silent repetition [of the mantra]. [When the Verse says they] enjoy immortality [it means] one should bring about liberation by the silent repetition of the mantra (*vidyā*).[140] *Īśa,* the Lord, is explained: *kāma,* desire. This is explained under the heading of *Īkṣata* [that is, in the *Brahmasūtra*] as being set forth by the scriptural passage (*śruti*), "He desired, let me be many, let me procreate."[141]

"Imagined" (*kalpakam*) refers to the presiding [deity] of the mentally constructed world as it is discussed [in the *Brahmasūtra*] under the heading [which begins with the *sūtra*], "Birth, etc."[142] Omniscient (*kavi*) [in the Verse] means the creator of the Veda (*vedapraṇetāram*) [i.e., Śiva].[143]

Kathyam means one to be understood only through the Vedas as it has been discussed [in the *Brahmasūtra*] under the heading [which begins with the *sūtra*], "*Śāstrayoni.*" What has been mentioned in both interpretations is [identified as] the supreme Brahman.[144] This is the special meaning established by the qualifiers here.[145]

[In Verse 1] beginning with the words "deathless, ancient" [she has been described] with the qualities of Brahman [i.e., in the neuter gender] while here [in this Verse she] is mentioned in the masculine gender, and in the forthcoming verse on *kāmakalā* meditation in the feminine gender. Thus there are three types of meditation (*dhyāna*) prescribed on the supreme deity [depending on the gender]. This is similarly collaborated in the *Kulārṇava* [*Tantra*]:

> The Devī should be recalled either in the masculine form or conceived in the feminine form; otherwise one should meditate on the partless (*niṣkalā*) characterized as being consciousness and bliss.[146]

Even though it is said, "One should meditate on the partless (*niṣkalā*) [aspect] in the supreme contemplative worship (*paropāsti*), on the masculine form in the subtle contemplative worship (*sūkṣmopāsti*) and on the feminine form in the external sacrifice (*bahiryāga*)," and this division is well-documented, still since it will be [later] stated that the masculine and feminine are of equal priority [meditation on one or the other] is an option [to be] chosen following one's own tradition (*sampradāya*).[147] With reference to the other *vidyās* (i.e., the mantras) worshiped (*upāsita*) by Manu, Candra, and others as mentioned in the *Tripurātāpinī* [*Upaniṣad*], in the present contexts the mention of these two [i.e., the mantras of Kāmarāja and Lopāmudrā only] suggests their importance. Hence in the *Jñānārṇava* [*Tantra*], in which is considered the twelve kinds of *vidyās*, [the difficulty in obtaining either of the two forms of the *śrīvidya*] has been corroborated:

> O Auspicious One, these two *vidyās* are difficult to obtain even for the gods.[148]

Of these two [*vidyās*] the *kādividyā*'s priority (*ādhikya*) is suggested because it has been described first. *Brahmapurāṇa* supports this view:

> Just as the *Kādi* [*mata*] texts are supreme [among the Tantric texts] so the *śrīvidyā* is supreme and likewise the *kādi* [mantra] is supreme.[149]

In fact I have well established in the *Setubandha* that since all *vidyās* are not different, a comparison of one to another is merely for the sake of praising [one and encouraging its performance].[150] Therefore the auspicious Bhagavatpāda [Śaṅkarācārya] in the *Saundaryalaharī* has presented these two [*vidyās*] in the reverse order [that is, he has presented the Lopāmudrā *hādividyā* version first in the text].[151] Even there [in the *Saundaryalaharī*] in order to follow this scripture (*śruti*) the words [in verse 32 of that text], *śiva, śakti, kāma, smāra, yoni,* and *lakṣmī* are interpreted by some differently, but that should not be accepted since it is faulty (*kliṣṭatva*) and meaningless (*nirarthakatva*).[152]

[It is faulty] since in the present context internal sacrifice (*antaryāga*) is the subject; and when they are mentioned again in Verse 12, the substances [employed in that internal sacrifice], it is because they must be employed with a different set of qualities [than they have in the internal sacrifice and because the silent repetition [of the mantra], which is included within the elements of [internal sacrifice], is [here] to be considered a subordinate aspect of internal sacrifice.[153]

"They enjoy the immortal" (*amṛtam bhajante*) is a statement of inducement just like [the inducement] of hearing about the sinless fame [gained as the result of performing good deeds].[154] Because even though [the phrase] is declarative (*mantratve'pi*), in the absence of any objection, it can be taken as an injunction (*vidhi*) and likewise can be taken as a statement of inducement (*arthavāda*). In the case of such words [as those in Verse 1] beginning with "the three cities" (*tisraḥ puraḥ*), even though it is a subordinate part of the injunction to internal sacrifice, it cannot be taken as a statement of inducement since there is no proof that every subordinate element in an injunction is a statement of inducement. Or [one can interpret the words to mean that] even [if taken as] a case of a statement of inducement, because it is a factual statement of inducement (*bhūtārthavāda*), it has validity in its own meaning.[155]

And it cannot be said that in Verse 12 the form of external sacrifice (*bahiryāga*) prescribed is different from the worship (*upāsti*) on the physical (i.e., *sthūla* aspect of the goddess]. Still in the fifteenth verse, because it is presented as a summary explanation of the meaning of the verbal root √*mad* (meaning "to be intoxicated"), the consideration of the contexts [in which external sacrifice is viewed as different from worship of the physical (*sthūla*) aspect of the goddess] cannot be avoided. In fact, equal importance [should be attached to] each of the three [kinds] of contemplative worship (*upāsti*).[156] Even in regard to the three prescriptions [to worship the goddess in physical, subtle, and transcendent forms] where the results of each are said [to be individually different], there is no means of deciding which is the relevant one when the fruits [of the worship (*upāsti*)] in general are declared just as in the case of the six types of fire sacrifice [in the *darśapūrṇimāsa* rites] where the results are accrued collectively and not severally. So it is said,

> The householder should always perform the internal sacrifice and the external sacrifice [as well as] worship (*arcanam*) of the king of cakras [i.e., the *śrīcakra*], silent repetition of the *vidyā* and praising [her] names [such as in the *Lalitāsahasranāmastotra*]. This much is the duty of the devotee. Anything else they consider supererogatory.[157]

But it is also said that internal sacrifice and silent repetition of the mantra alone bring about results in one who is eminently qualified. Those familiar with reasoning may figure out such analogies as that with the attainment of fruits even in the absence of the use of cake offerings in the *agniṣṭoma* on the part of one who has not made a soma sacrifice.[158]

Now the tenth verse is spoken, beginning with the words "the three worlds" (*triviṣṭapam),* in order to prescribe the contemplative worship (*upāsti*) of the physical [form] of the principal deity conceived as inwardly having qualities (*antarsaguṇatvena*); in order to establish [her] on the external [form] of the [*śrī-*] *cakra* and in order to indicate [her] physical characteristics (*sthūlaviśeṣam*).

[VERSE 10] I praise the Mother of the Universe [who dwells in] the three worlds, on the three sides [i.e., the triangles] consisting of nine lines in the middle of which is the vowel "*aḥ*" (*visarga*).

She shines as the primordial sixteenth *nityā* [present] in the midst of the city [i.e., the *śrīcakra,* she who is] great [and the cause of] the fifteen *tithis.*

triviṣṭapam trimukham viśvamāturnavarekhāḥsvaramadhyam tadīle/ bṛhattithīrdaśapañcādinityā sā ṣoḍaśī puramadhyam bibhartti//

After the word "lines" (*rekhā*) [in the Verse] the sixteenth vowel [that is, the] *visarga,* is to be retained [rather than assimilated according to the rules of grammatical combination, i.e., *sandhi*]. [The sense of the words "the nine lines," etc., in the Verse is that] in the [midst of] nine lines formed by the nine *Yoni*s, the middle position is in the position of the vowel '*aḥ*' [that is, the *visarga*]. [An] alternative [explanation is that the *Yoni*s] which consist of nine lines form the *samhāra cakra* [that is, the eight minor triangles of the *vasukoṇa cakra* plus the central triangle], in the middle of which is the place characterized by the vowel "*aḥ.*" Or the letter (*akṣara*) [i.e., the vowel "*aḥ*"] can be divided grammatically to mean that the [vowel] "*aḥ*" is that vowel (*svara*) which has the form of the letter '*a*' (*akāra*). That is to say that [the compound] "the three sides" (*trimukham*) is just such a type of triangle, that is, the central triangle.

This is as much as to say [that in the middle of the central triangle of the *śrīcakra*] is the place of worship (*pūjāsthānam*), the place where [she] dwells [called in the verse] "the three worlds" (*triviṣṭapam*) [and there is the goddess] Tripurasundarī [literally the "Beauty of the Three Cities," called in the Verse] the Mother of the Universe (*viśvamātuḥ*). Here the place [designated in the Verse as the three worlds] explicitly refers to heaven (*svarga*) which is the abode of the gods.

"I praise" (*tad īle*) [in the Verse] is the praiser's statement (*iti stotur vākyam*). According to the prescriptions of Vedic grammar (*prātiśākhya*) "*la*" is the substitute of "*ḍa*" [when it is said], "The letter '*la*' is [substituted] when the letter '*ḍa*' occurs between two vowels."[159] This same Upaniṣad is also recited by the members of the Ātharvaṇika school. But in their opinion there is no such substitution of "*la*" [for "*ḍa*"].[160] What is suggested is that by saying the [vowel] "*aḥ*" should be in the middle [of the central triangle of the *śrīcakra*] the remaining fifteen vowels should be placed on the three lines [of the central triangle] surrounding the *bindu* [in the center].[161] [This is] according to the dictum, "It should be [distributed] equally"; [these fifteen vowels] are placed [on each of the three sides of the central triangle] five to a side.

That [central] triangle is [called in the Verse] great (*bṛhad*) because it is imagined that the fifteen *tithi*s who are the fifteen deities of the lunar days of the month, beginning with Kāmeśvarī and ending with Citra, are eternal (*nityā*) [and] shine (*bibhartti*) [as mentioned also in the Verse]. The intention is that one should perform the worship (*pūjā*) of the [fifteen] *nityā*s [i.e., the "eternal" deities identified with the *tithi*s, identifying] five on each of the right, upper, and left sides [of the central triangle of the *śrīcakra*].[162] This has been corroborated in *Jñānārṇava* [*Tantra*]:

> And that is imagined as great (*mahat*). The three [sets of *nityādevatā*s] in the order of right, upper and left [sides] should be inscribed on the [three] lines, five each respectively. On the right [side line] should be imagined the five beginning with [the deity Kāmeśvarī whose seed-syllable (*bījākṣara*)] is "*a*" and ending with [the deity Vahni whose seed-syllable is] "*u*"; then on the upper [side] the group beginning with "*u*" [that is, Maheśvarī]; on the left are inscribed the five beginning with Śakti [i.e., "*e*," "*o*," "*ai*," and "*au*"] up to the *anusvāra* [i.e., "*aṃ*"] and is the middle is worshiped the *visarga* [i.e., "*aḥ*"] as the sixteenth.[163]

The phases of the moon, characterized by waxing and waning, are fifteen and they alone are the *tithi*s. In other Tantras it is said:[164]

> And from the new moon to the full moon the phases (*kalā*) are exactly fifteen.[165]

This [central triangle is identified with] "seeing, seen, and seer," as in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* and elsewhere.[166] The sixteenth phase known as *sādākhya* (literally, "said always to exist") being without waxing and waning is the cause of all the other [fifteen]. And that [*sādākhya*], the sixteenth identified with the unity [supreme goddess and Śiva] being the cause of the fifteen *nityās* is called the Original *Nityā* (ādinityā).

[The word] "She" [in the Verse] has been described previously as Tripurasundarī and others, the very form (*svarūpa*) of *nityā*.[167] [The compound *puramadhyam* as it occurs in the Verse is interpreted: She is identified on] the place of the *visarga* vowel, that is, in the middle (*madhyam*) of the city (*pura*) which is the *śrīcakra* [and there she] shines (*bibhartti*), that is to say, [she] is present (*adhyāste*). This [interpretation] is to be considered proper because the letter "*ha*" having the form of Illumination (*prakāśa*, identified with Śiva) and Reflection (*vimarśa*, identified with Śakti) has the very nature of that sixteenth vowel.

In order to instruct in these present contexts the meditation on *Kāmakalā* associated with external sacrifice (*bahiryāga*), the eleventh verse is spoken.

[VERSE 11]

> [In *Kāmakalā* meditation] the two circles are the two breasts, the one reflection is the face and half [the letter "*ha*" is the female organ]. The three [limbs of the body] are the secret mansions [identified with the outermost three lines of the *bhūgṛha* sub-*cakra* of the *śrīcakra*].
>
> Meditating upon the desired, the aspect (*kalā*) [of Manmatha] [and] what has a desirable form, a man is born the Form of Desire [i.e., Śiva] desired [by women].
>
> *dvā maṇḍalā dvā stanā bimbamekam mukhaṃ cādhastrīṇī guhā sadanāni/ kāmīṃ kalāṃ kāmyarūpāṃ viditvā naro jāyate kāmarūpaśca kāmyaḥ//*

[In the Verse] the two circles [refer to] the two breasts. The one reflection is the face below. The three mansions (*sadanāni*) are [the three outer lines of] the *bhūgṛha* [*cakra*, that is the outer gateway of the *śrīcakra* surrounding the configuration]. The secret [form identified with the female organ is represented by] the form of half the letter "*ha*" (*hakārārdha*).[168]

Even though according to lexical meanings the [word] "reflection" (*bimba*) is nonfeminine [in gender] and "circle" (*maṇḍala*) is [found] in [all] three genders, and even though the word "reflection" can have the [grammatical] sense of "circle" and follows the description of the three circles (*maṇḍalas*) given in Verse 4, they are identified in this context with the two breasts as the fire circle (*vahnimaṇḍala*) and the sun circle (*sūryamaṇḍala*) because of the intention with which the word "reflection" is used here. Nevertheless, according to the order of the rendering [in this text] the face alone is the reflection (*bimba*) identified with the moon [*maṇḍala*] and is below the breasts. [This is the case] because of the intention with which [the word] "half" (*ardhaḥ*) is used [in the verse].

"Half the letter '*ha*' " clearly infers the *bhūpura* [*cakra,* that is the outermost gateways of the *śrīcakra*] which is [considered in meditation to be] below the breasts. There are [however] various forms of *kāmakalā* [meditation] given in a reverse order [of description] in various places in the Tantras. Nevertheless the Bhagavatpāda [Śaṅkarācārya] has corroborated by following the order of meaning rather than the order of words by saying,

> One should meditate imagining the face as the *bindu* [in the center of the *śrīcakra*] below which are the two breasts and below that half the letter "*ha*" [i.e., the female organ].[169]

The word "reflection" (*bimba*) refers to the *bindu* [and] that [reflection] refers to the collection of *cakras* beginning with the *bindu* [in the center of the *śrīcakra*] and ending with the *manvaśra cakra* [that is, the *cakra* of fourteen minor triangles].[170]

> The forms of the three circles have the nature of a wheel (*cakra*), power (*śakti*), and fire (*anala*).[171]

Thus in this [above quoted] verse of the *Sundarīhṛdaya* the word "circle" (*maṇḍali*) is explained as referring to the [sub-] *cakras* [of the *śrīcakra*] beginning with the inner ten [minor triangles] and the rest [proceeding outward].

In order to conceive the six *maṇḍalas* [of the *śrīcakra*] beginning with the *bindu* [and proceeding outward] as a single unit, the word "one" [is used in Verse 11].

[The words in the Verse] "the two circles" (*dvā maṇḍalau*) refer to the two [sub-] *cakras* of eight and sixteen [lotus] petals.

The mention of these three limbs [of the body] suggests all the limbs [of the body]. Actually even the [human] body has only three limbs, [namely,] (1) from the head to the throat, (2) from the throat to the breasts, and (3) from the heart to the anus.[172] The hair, hands, and feet are each their own respective branches.

Thus the [word] *kāmīṃ* [in the Verse] refers to one who has transformed himself into the nature of all the [sub-] *cakras* [of the *śrīcakra*]. *Kalā* [in the Verse refers to that aspect of the evolution of the thirty-six *tattvas* which make up the world as] the aspect (*kalā*) of consciousness associated with Manmatha [i.e., Śiva] who has the nature of Kāmeśvara, the lord of desire. [The words in the Verse] *kāmyarūpam* [literally, a desirable form, means his] very form itself is desirable. "Knowing" [in the Verse] means meditating upon. In another branch [of the Vedic schools] the reading is *cikitvā* [literally, knowing, for *viditvā* as it is here].[173] [The word] "man" (*nara*) means the meditative worshipper (*upāsaka*). *Kāmarūpa* [the Form of desire] refers [in the Verse] to Manmatha [i.e., Śiva] who causes an immediate [mental] disturbance (*kṣobhakara*) in all women by virtue of his beauty. This tells us very little [about the concept of *kāmakalā* meditation and Śiva's role], and so he says [further]: "Desirable" (*kāmya*) means hearing of his special attributes [one becomes like him, desirable] and a form attractive to all the people living in the three worlds. It has been said by Bhagavatpāda [Śaṅkarācārya]:

> Whoso meditates, O Consort of Hara, on your *kalā* [i.e., seed syllable] of Manmatha suddenly leads women to confusion, how much less is [the woman called] the Three Worlds (*trilokīṃ*) confused, [She] who has the sun and the moon as her breasts.[174]

Thus one who wishes to obtain a desirable form should meditate on the *kāmakalā* according to the prescription which connects the fruit with the attributes [of meditation].[175] However, the Bhagavatpāda's intention here is that the fruit of the meditation prescribed having a particular result is achieved even apart from (*bahir*) the external sacrifice (*bahiryāga*); [this is the case because the result] is not connected as an [inseparable] part of the external sacrifice as the *śyena* sacrifice (*śyenakratvādeḥ*) is as a part of the Soma [sacrifice], so by its nature (*svataḥ*) it does not depend upon the form of any other ritual (*kriyā*). In the *Nityāṣoḍaśīkārṇava* [it says]:

> Conceiving the *bindu* as the face, and the two breasts are established as below that.
>
> One should consider the female organ (*adhomukham*) together with half the letter "*ha*" as below those [two breasts].[176]

If you say that this meditation is thought of in the sense of a sacrifice because it's enjoined in the section on sacrifice [in the *Nityāṣoḍaśīkārṇava*], what harm is there in that? Since there is no objection even for external practice [of this form of meditation] for those whose aim is its fruits.[177] Hence it is said in the *Bhaktisūtra,* beginning with a recollection of the Blessed One [Kṛṣṇa], "Everything is, as it were, covered both inside and outside."[178]

The twelfth verse is spoken in order to enjoin the substances used in external sacrifice and the method of employing [these] substances in the external sacrifice.

> Wine, fish, and before [fish] meat; grains and wombs [indicating sexual intercourse] should be well-performed [in the ritual worship]. [Verse 12]
>
> Offering food to the great goddess, the adept performer should take it for himself [and so] accomplish [the aim of the sacrifice].
>
> *parisrutam jhaṣamādyam palam ca bhaktāni yonīḥ supariṣkṛtāni/*
> *nivedayandevatāyai mahatyai svātmīkṛtya sukṛtī siddhimeti//*

[The word] *jhaṣa* [in the Verse] means fish (*matsya*); *palam* means meat (*māṃsam*).

[The Verse says] before the fish [is ritually offered and consumed] there is wine. The meaning is that after the first [*makāra,* wine] is the second [i.e., fish]. Accordingly, meat becomes the third [*makāra*].

[The word] *bhaktāni,* enjoining the various types of food made from grains such as pulse-cakes, chick peas, etc., is the fourth [*makāra*].[179] *Yoni* [literally, womb] indicates the female organ and that suggests the fifth [*makāra,* namely *maithuna* or sexual intercourse].[180] The usage of *yoni* in the plural expresses the difference in castes (*jāti*) such as priests, warriors, and others. Supporting that interpretation are phrases like, "beginning with the eight types of groups (*kula*)." [This support] is observed in the Tantras.[181] [The word] "and" [in the Verse] indicates the combination of these five [*makāras*]. Even though [the word] "meat" is read after the word "fish" [in the Verse] it should be placed before fish as is indicated by the [use of the] word "before" (*ādya*). A [specific] order [the Verse] intends to be followed for the [ritual use of the] *makāras*.

Therefore if the primary [substance of the *makāra*] is not available a substitute (*pratinidhi*) may be used according to the maxim, "In the event that [all] the five *makāras* are not available the daily worship should be performed." Even though this is established in the [*Paraśurāma-*] *Kalpasūtra,* what has been suggested is that when the preceding element is unavailable the succeeding ones, even if they are primary [and not substitutions], should not be used.[182] Despite the unavailability of even the first [*makāra*], according to traditional practice (*sampradāyālabhyam*), one should use the fourth [*makāra,* that is, fermented grains (*mudrā*)] since this is considered essential for the sake of [the ritual] food offerings (*naivedyam*).

But if one accepts the reading "*ājyam*" [instead of *ādyam* as it is here advised] according to other schools [of interpretation] then the meaning is only "clarified butter" (*ghṛtam*) [and not "before" as suggested here].[183] [If] here [*ājyam*] is taken to mean "cooked" then by the maxim of the crow's eye it is an epithet of both [fish and meat].[184] Furthermore it is not logical to explain [*ājyam*] as [something] connected with goats (*aja*) [like goat's flesh]. A different meaning [for ā*jyam*] is seen in the Tantras, and the enumeration of the five *makāra*s as stated in the Verse is contradicted [if one reads *ājyam* instead of *ādyam*].[185]

The [use of wine] is enough to please (*tarpaṇa*) the supreme deity, [and] the sacrifice (*yāga*) should be done with a substitute [for the first *makāra*]. It is inferred by a maxim of the sixth [book of the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* that] there is nothing objectionable in not taking for oneself [the *makāras*] in the external sacrifice [though this makes the sacrifice complete.][186]

[The term] "well-performed" (*supariṣkṛtāni*) means fulfilled [or perfected, *samskṛtāni*] by rites (*saṃskāra*) visible and invisible. And these [visible and invisible rites] are mundane (*laukika*) when they take the form of cooking, etc., and Vedic [or extraordinary, *vaidika*] when they take the form of removing curses, etc. This is well established in many Tantras, or by the dictum stated in the [*Paraśurāma-*] *Kalpasūtra,* "Many or few [prescriptions] have been stated in one's own ritual text (*gṛhyasūtra*)."[187]

[The words in the Verse] *mahatyai devatāyai* mean "to the Great Goddess"; "offering food" (*nivedayan*) means sacrificing (*yajan*); "the adept performer" (*sukṛtī*) means the performer of the external sacrifice (*bahiryāgakartā*). "Taking for oneself" (*svātmīkṛtya*) means consuming them [that is, the offerings] oneself; "accomplished" (*siddhim*) means one obtains the results of sacrifice (*yāgaphalam*).

By the sacrifice employing the five m's [*mapañcaka*], beginning with the first and adding each successively, one should achieve the desired result of [identity with] the deity who is the great goddess. Thus the method by which this [Verse] has become an injunction (*vidhi*) [to use the five *makāras* rather than a mere statement concerning them], it should be noted, is comparable to the injunction to perform internal worship (*antaryāga*).

The thirteenth verse is spoken in order to instruct meditation on the deity [conceived of as] having qualities as an accessory to the sacrifice (*kratvāṅam*).

> [She] has, as it were, a white goad and is the Mother of the universe. The desirous [she] binds bound by the noose [of their own desires]. [Verse 13]
>
> [She] strikes down with a bow and five arrows [desire]. [She is] red, the primordial power, and [has a] universal view [of all beings' karma].
>
> *sṛṇyeva sitayā viśvacarṣaṇih pāśena pratibandhātyabhokān/ iṣubhiḥ*
> *pañcabhirdhanuṣā ca vidhyatyādiśaktiraruṇā viśvacanyā//*

"*Sṛṇyeva sitayā*" [in the Verse] are in the third case [the word *sṛṇi* occurring as *sṛṇya,* according to Pāṇini *sūtra,* 2.3.21] "any characteristic indicating a state (or condition) is put in the instrumental case to express this relation."[188] [The word] *sitayā* means white (*śvetayā*), that is, made of silver; or because there is no difference between *sa* and *śa* [as in *sitayā,* then *śitayā*] can mean sharp (*niśitayā*), that is, a sharp instrument. *Sṛṇyā* means [the goddess] is characterized, as it were, by having an elephant goad [in one of Her hands.]. *Viśvajanyā* [is an exocentric (*bahuvrīhi*) compound meaning] she is the Mother of the universe because she is the One from whom everything is born.[189] *Aruṇā* [in the Verse] means possessing a red color (*lauhityavat*). [The words] "Primordial Śakti" (*ādiśakti*) mean [the goddess] Mahātripurasundarī [who has a] universal view (*viśvacarṣaṇī*) over all beings' good and evil actions (*karma*).[190]

[The word] "desirous" (*abhikān*) means lustful persons, namely, low people who undertake [this] path due to their desirous or passionate nature [that] binds (*pratibandha*) [them]. [She, with] "a bow" (*dhanuṣā*) "with five arrows" (*pañcabhir subhir*) pierces [the desires, that is, causes them to fall (*vidhyati*)].[191]

Those who, without desires, having a sharp intellect (*vaidhadhiyā*), undertake [this path] are uplifted, and because this matter is clear it is not repeated here. It is said:

> One should serve [Her] only with the known injunctions. If one [serves] with desire she causes them to fall. Those substances by which one falls are the very same ones through which one gains liberation. For the lustful and those without lust these paths are established.[192]

Yāska [the Vedic grammarian] says [the word] "*sṛṇi*" has a twofold meaning [indicating] both protector and slayer.[193]

Construing the word "as it were" (*iva*) with all the words of the text, she appears [dualistically] out of compassion for her devotees only imaginatively as having qualities, while what is suggested is that ultimately her form is qualityless.

The fourteenth verse is spoken in order to teach the equality of male and female forms as conceptualized with qualities.

[VERSE 14]

> The Prosperous (*bhaga*) [Lord] is the blessed Śakti who is both Desire and the Lord [that is, Śiva]. [Śiva and Śakti are] the two givers in this [contemplative worship] of prosperity.
>
> [These] two are the same substance, have the same nature, are completely identical and of equal power. [She is] without decay [and] the womb of the universe, [the creator].
> *bhagaḥ śaktirbhagavān kāma īśa ubhā dātārāviha saubhagānāṃ/*
> *samapradhānau samasattvau samotayoḥ samaśaktirajarā viśvayoniḥ//*

[The word] *bhaga* [in the Verse] is a synonym for Lord (*īśa*). [The *Viṣṇupurāṇa* says:]

> There are six considered [attributes of] *Bhaga* [the lord]: empowerment (*aiśvarya*), Dharma, fame, prosperity, knowledge (*jñāna*), and discrimination (*vijñāna*).[194]

In such scriptures (*smṛti*) the various qualities that make up the body of the Lord are all designated here by the word *bhaga*.[195] Śakti [the goddess] is said to be that very collection of qualities (*dharmasamūha*). This is the identical (*svarūpa*) deity in feminine form described for the sake of contemplative worship (*upāsyatvena*). It has been said in the *Nagānanda Sūtra* that Brahman [the Absolute] whose nature is luminosity (*prakāśātmanaḥ*) takes reflection (*vimarśa*) as its intrinsic nature; in the Āgamas [reflection] is described as the nature of consciousness within conscious beings, born out of its own essence; [it is] Supreme Speech (*parā vāk*), independent (*svatantryam*), the Supreme Self, [and] empowers (*aiśvarya*); [it has the characteristics of] reality (*satattvam*), being (*sattā*), effulgence (*sphurattā*), [and] essence (*sārā*); [She also as] the Little Mother Mālinī, is in the image of the heart, self-consciousness (*svasamvit*), and active (*spanda*). The explanation of these special qualities is to be seen only in the commentary [on the *Nagānanda Sūtras*].[196]

"The Blessed One" (*bhagavān*) [in the Verse] means the one qualified by that collection of qualities [listed above].[197] "Desire" (*kāma*) and "Lord" (*īśa*) refer to Kāmeśvara [the Lord of Desire] who alone is the masculine form of the deity that is worshiped (*upāsyadevatā*). [The word] "here" (*iha*) means in this contemplative worship (*upāsanāyām*) of prosperity (*saubhagānām*) which has the forms of Dharma, wealth, and desire [the human objectives and] yields various fruits. Even though there are two givers (*dātārau*) [stated in the Verse] the deity is only one; though it is twofold [in masculine and feminine aspects] when meditated upon as having qualities, [this is for the sake of] accomplishing the three aims [of human existence, Dharma, wealth, and desire]. This is the meaning [of the Verse].

"*Sampradhānau*" [and] "*samasattvau*" meaning 'the two are of equal importance' [have the same meaning]. The word *sattva* means a quality and by that is meant the [two] exist in the relationship of quality and qualified. [The meaning] intended is that in the meditation (*dhyāna*) Kāmeśvarī (Śakti) is seated on the lap of Kāmeśvara (Śiva) which indicates that Śiva is the base (*ādhāra*), [he] is the quality (*guṇa*), and Śakti is the substance (*pradhānam*). But in the meditation in which Ambikā is joined with Śiva as half [his body] because of the special form [sharing] head, hands, feet, and other limbs, Śakti is the quality (*guṇa*) and Śiva is the substance (*pradhānam*).[198] Thus though they are equal in granting [their devotees] what is desired [and] are related to one another as quality and substance, [Śiva] in his aspect [*aṃśaḥ*] as creator of the universe is dependent upon Śakti.[199] "The sameness of the two" (*samotayor* is said to suggest that, meditating on only the feminine aspect, one achieves the result. [*Samotayor* is grammatically explained as meaning] of the two completely (*samyak*) undivided mutually, a joining of the two (*utayor*) as half Śiva and half Śakti is the form of *Ardhanārīśvara*. "Equal power" (*samaśakti*) means the all-powerful goddess who is a collection of all (*nikhila*) qualities, [she alone] is the Womb of the universe (*viśvayoni*), Maker of the universe. To illustrate this, the *Śaktisūtra* says,

> The Conscious One (*citiḥ*) is independently the cause for the establishment of the universe.[200]

It is established in verses such as, "Desiring to protect us from all (*samasmad*) who would harm us," that the word *sama* is a synonym for all (*sarva*).[201] "Without decay" (*ajarā*) is an adjective [applied to the goddess] in Her aspect as the Womb of the Universe (*viśvayoni*) [that is, as its creator]. The meaning is that as the Maker of the Universe (*jagatkartṛ*) she is the natural order (*ṛta*) because she is known as valid means of cognition such as perception, etc., about which there can be no doubt. So it has been said in the *Devībhāgavata*,

> Śakti creates the universal egg (*brahmāṇḍa*), she protects, verily, everything. By Her own desire she collects this universe of moving and unmoving [things]. Not Viṣṇu nor Śiva, nor Indra, Brahmā or Agni, not Sūrya nor Varuṇā are capable in their own right of anything [without her]. Those gods perform their own work having been united with her. That [she is] the cause for all actions is understood by sense perception (*pratyakṣa*) [a valid means of cognition].[202]

Also elsewhere [in the *Devībhāgavata* it is said]:

> Even Śiva becomes a corpse when separated from Kuṇḍalinī.
> The wise know that one bereft of Śakti is capable of nothing.[203]

The details are to be seen in the *Setubandha* [my commentary on the *Vāmakeśvara Tantra*].[204] Therefore even though Śiva can confer fruits, because he is depending upon Śakti, it is a bit delayed; but in respect to Śakti [since she is] not depending on anyone there is no delay.[205] Those who desire to achieve results quickly should meditate on the deity only in the feminine form.

Thus having stated the twofold meditation on [the deities when considered] with qualities, because there has been no mention of the aspect to be meditated upon as qualityless, the fifteenth verse is said to teach that [qualityless meditation] and the means by which that [meditation is accomplished].[206]

[Verse 15]

> Purified [by rituals and mantras], by offerings (*haviṣā*), by drinking, by the mind's [efforts], indeed [all] the limitations [on Self-Realization] are dissolved.
> [The Self of] All is [called] the Creator of all the World, Maintainer [and] Destroyer, the Form of the Universe.
> *parisrutā haviṣā pāvitena prasamkoce galite vai manstaḥ/ sarvaḥ sarvasya jagato vidhātā dhartā hartā viśvarūpatvameti//*

[Some] authors have stated that the various methods [described] in the active path (*karmamārga*), the knowledge path (*jñānamārga*), and the path of devotion (*bhaktimārga*) are mutually contradictory. It is clear to those who know the texts that all those [methods described], because they are difficult to practice, yield results only over a long period. And hence the only method [that is truly effective proceeds through] a series of stages (*ullāsa*) adopted through repeated practice and one's consumption of ritual offerings. In this regard the formulated rules should be [followed] up to the mature-stage (*prauḍhollāsa*), after which it is as you please; in the last stage you obtain Brahman's own form (*brahmasvarūpatā*). And this is further illustrated in the [*Paraśurāma-*] *Kalpasūtra:*

> Among the [seven] stages, namely, the initial, incipient, youthful, mature, the end of the mature, the detached and stateless stages, the rules of conduct are to be followed only up to the mature stage and afterwards as you please.[207]

Descriptions of the sevenfold stages are to be seen in the *Kulārṇava* and other [Tantras].[208]

Even though everyday Brahman's very form is obtained in deep sleep, because of the mind's dissolution [such that one has no cognition of oneself] and likewise because there is a connection with sleep as a special form of the development of ignorance, that [type of experience of Brahman] is not [regarded ordinarily] as a human aim.[209] That state of sleeplessness in the usual sense is a human aim at the level of knowledge the wise consider the seventh [stage]. The Yogis experience that [seventh stage] known as conceptionless equipoise (*nirvikalpasamādhitvena*); and that state the Yogis experience as the stage beyond the detached [stage] and as being the stateless (*anavasthā*) [stage].[210] It has been said:

> The form of Brahman is bliss and that is established in the body. The [ritual] substances which manifest that [bliss] are drunk by the Yogis.[211]

But in the [*Paraśurāma-*] *Kalpasūtra* the manifestor of this [bliss] is said to be the five *makāras*.[212] However if the substances when not ritually used [and so considered] impure (*apavitram*) are drunk then because they actively obstruct the aims of human life, they bind one to sin [and] are not capable of inducing that [blissful] state. In the *Samayācārasmṛti* it has been said:

> (A) The impure drink of ordinary persons produces quarrelsomeness, anxiety, and sin. That which is without ritual mantras is only ordinary drink.
> (B) Having drunk according to the prescriptions of ordinary drink even the hero goes to hell. Purified (*samskṛta*) [drink] is enlightening, expiating, and makes pure (*suddhikṛt*).
> (C) By this [purification] there is destroyed [what is ordinarily] great degeneration, and revelation (*sphuraṇam*) of mantras [occurs]. From purified drink [one obtains] long life, auspiciousness (*śrīḥ*), distinction (*kānti*), prosperity

> (*saubhāgyam*), knowledge (*jñāna*), the eight types of empowerment, and the ability to fly. A brahman should drink liquor in the *sautrāmaṇī* [sacrifice which is part of the Vedic *soma* sacrifice] and at the time of ritual worship (*kulācāra*).
>
> (D) Otherwise having drunk out of desire one ought to perform an expiation (*prāyaścittam*).[213]

But,

> [It is] better that the vital breaths go [that is, one dies], but a brāhmaṇa should not offer liquor [in ritual]. A *brāhmaṇa* who offers liquor becomes stripped of his brāhmanhood.[214]

Because of such restrictions as these stated in the *Śaktisaṃgama Tantra* and the *Tantrarāja Tantra*, the means by which one overcomes the entanglements in Dharma are to be understood only from tradition.[215] And the methods of establishing [the means to overcome the entanglements in Dharma that arise due to these contradictory statements in the scriptures] I have explained in the commentary on the *Kaulopaniṣad*.[216] Therefore those qualified persons who have attained the [higher] stages [realize] the individual self (*jīvātman*) is different than the inner mental process (*antaḥkaraṇa*); when the obstacles of the inner mental process are removed and the experience of Brahman [is obtained], what else remains [for one to achieve]?

And one should not say that their aim was not obtained [simply] because of the temporariness of the stage [reached by use of] substances [such as wine]. The same applies to meditative concentration (*samādhi*). In this regard [one should observe that] by methods such as controlling the breath one enters into meditative concentration (*samādhi*) again and again by the proficiency gained over a period of time; after some time even without breath control one obtains permanent meditative concentration. So it is said that those who board a boat on the ocean feel a swaying back and forth due to [motion of] the waves and when they alight from the boat the feeling of swaying continues; likewise in the present contexts, by the proficiency gained [when attaining the] detached (*unmanī*) and stateless (*anavastha*) [stages] by drinking purified substances [such as ritually consecrated wine then], even without the substances, after a few days a similar state not [liquor]-induced is accomplished.

The meaning of the words [in the Verse is as follows]:

Purified (*pāvitena*) by rituals and mantras, by what is left over after the worship of the goddess (*haviṣā*), by drinking (*parisrutā*), [by what is] born out of the internal mental process (*manastaḥ*), [and] the limitation (*saṃkoce*) of [attaining Self-realization] being dissolved by inactivity, one [attains] the stateless [stage] following the stage of detachment. This is to paraphrase [the Verse]. [The particle] *vai* [means] certainly, [thus] one becomes the Self of all (*sarva*). This is to summarize [the Verse's meaning].

Therefore the meaning of the verbal root √*mad* ["to be intoxicated"] in statements taken as injunctions for internal sacrifice [indicates inducing the bliss] of conceptionlessness in which the only object is one's Self. It is with this intention only that the various types of intoxication are explained in the Tantras.

> Those intoxicated, having drunk, become passionate; those passionate become angry.
> Singers who have drunk sing, Yogins who have drunk meditate.[217]

What is intended is that a special [type of] yogi achieves that [meditative state] with this help.

The nature of the Self of all is explained [to mean that] Brahmā is the Creator of all the world (*sarvasya jagato vidhātā*); the Maintainer (*bhartā*) means Viṣṇu, the Destroyer (*hartā*) means Rudra [i.e., Śiva]. Why should one unnecessarily elaborate? A slave, a fisherman, a cheat, every living being is that [Self of all in] "the form of the universe" [as the Verse says]. So let the body fall by its accumulated [karma] anytime, anywhere, there is nothing special about it, because what is to be accomplished has already been accomplished: this is the intention. It has been said in the [*Paraśurāma-*] *Kalpasūtra,*

> Knowing in this way, one who has performed [the rituals] according to injunctions [and is] established in the [Tantric] practice, being one who has done what is to be done in all respects, if he leaves the body in the house of a butcher or in Kāśī [the holy city] there is no difference: He is liberated while yet living.[218]

Now the sixteenth and final verse concluding what has been described as the doctrine regarding [the goddess] Tripurā is spoken in order to instruct the fruit that arises from studying it.

[VERSE 16] This is the great Upaniṣad [in the form of statements expounding the secret meaning] of [the goddess] Tripurā. The Supreme Indestructible [Brahma] praises that [Upaniṣad] which is the Supreme Knowledge [that] this *Ṛg* [*Veda* source] and the *Yajur, Sāma, Atharva* [*Veda*s], and other [sources contain]. *AUṂ!*

iyaṃ mahopaniṣattripurāyā yāmakṣaram parame gīrbhirīṭṭe/
eṣargyajuḥ parametacca sāma evāyamatharveyamanyā ca vidyo'm

This [Upaniṣad] has been elaborated upon by the author of the [*Paraśurāma-*] *Kalpasūtra,* the Lord Śrī Paraśurāma:

> "One who studies this great Upaniṣad since it is the entire essence of the doctrine of the great Traipura [the goddess] becomes the sacrificer of all sacrifices. Whatever sacrifice is studied [its fruit] is obtained as desired with the sacrifice of this [Upaniṣad]." So it is revealed [concluding with the words] "Upaniṣad" [and] "auspiciousness."[219]

By this [quotation one should understand that] whatever has not been stated or is lacking in this Upaniṣad, [those] meanings are to be taken from the [*Paraśurāma-*] *Kalpasūtra.* It is established in the sections of the [*Paraśurāma-*] *Kalpasūtra* [designed] for those incapable of collecting the parts [of the teaching] scattered according to the different [Vedic] schools, to assert the authority of this treatise on practical matters.

The meanings of the words [in the Verse are as follows]:

This (*iyam*), that is, the great Upaniṣad "in the form of statements expounding the secret meaning" of Tripurā is to be supplied [to make sense of the Verse]. The reason for this is stated [in the words] beginning with "that which" (*yam*). "The Supreme Indestructible" (*paramākṣaram*) means Brahma, the Agent; "the which" (*yam*) means the Upaniṣad; "with praising [words]" (*gīrbhiḥ*) "he praises" (*īṭṭe*). *Īḍa* is used in the sense of "praising" (*stutau*); [in determining the grammatical form] *parame,* supreme, [as being in the locative singular case] *-śe* is the substitute for *-su* in [the grammar of the] Vedas.[220] By interchanging [the grammatical declension of] the second case-ending [that is, the accusative form] *yam* with the first case-ending [nominative] Brahma [the Verse can be interpreted to mean] either praising the author of the Upaniṣad or as the author praising Brahman. The meaning is that either Parameśvara does the praising or it is he who is being praised, or that knowledge praises Tripurā [the goddess]. Or [the word *parame*] can be divided as "*param*" [and] "*e*" which means the indestructible (*akṣara*) [Śiva] has the form of the letter "*e*." So it is said:

> It is seen even today that the letter "*e*" is the seed and the basis for the emergence of the three triangles from the universal egg to the mound of earth.[221]

Even the letter "*e*" can be divided into "*a*" plus "*i*" because it is said in the scriptures that "the letter '*a*' is verily the entire speech," "if one hears '*i*', one hears it without '*ka*' and '*la*'." Or [it may be interpreted that] the supreme *Auṃ* [is construed] as the letter "*a*" in a special manner.[222] The meaning is that [*Auṃ*] being the combination of "*a*", "*u*", and "*m*" [suggests] supreme and undivided praises.[223] It is recalled in the *Śivarahasya*, "The word *Auṃ* contains what is compounded or individual, O Giver of Protection."[224]

"One should study one's own chapters [of the Vedas]" [and because of that injunction] one reads their own [prescribed] chapters [and what is obtained] is that one gains [liberation] from this [Upaniṣad].[225] [This is what is suggested by the word] "this" (*eṣa*) [in the Verse]. According to the Atharva school and others' reading, the words "*Ṛg*," etc., mean the Vedas and not individual mantras. The words *eṣa, etad,* and *ayam* [all literally meaning "this"] refer to the *Ṛg, Yajur,* and *Atharva* [*Veda*s] in a special way. The *Sāma* [*Veda*] by virtue of its being sung and not being, as it were, syllables [is suggested by] the word *iti* [used here to mean "thus"] suggesting that its results (*phalam*) are equal to those [other Vedas occurring] in syllables.

Among the eighteen traditional sciences (*vidyā*s) only four are mentioned here; by the word "other" (*anya*) the [remaining] fourteen are indicated. The meaning is that this Upaniṣad is the essence (*svarūpa*) of everything.

The essence (*svarūpa*) of the *praṇava* also [is intended] so [the text says] *Aum*. [By the Pāṇinian rule], "*omānoś ca,*" it is the form of the subsequent letter [which is retained, thus the Verse reads *vidyā om* rather than combining, according to *sandhi* rules, to *vidyāum*].[226] Therefore the [esoteric] sense is that [this Upaniṣad] should be studied even by mendicants [since it contains *Oṃ,* the mantra specially prescribed for them].

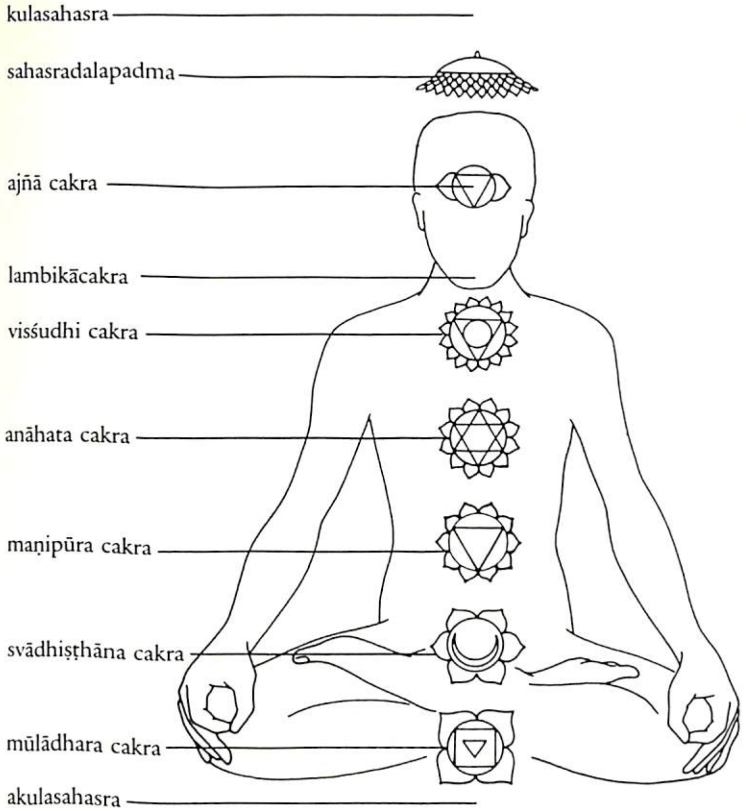
This Upaniṣad has this nature [namely of the fourteen *vidyā*s, *Oṃ,* the four Vedas, etc.,], the greatness of which even the scriptures are not capable of describing. Because this [Upaniṣad] has the form of Brahman in which words cannot begin [to describe its greatness], the scriptures intentionally prefer to remain silent. [The words] *ity upaniṣad* means [the Upaniṣad] concludes. The intention is that more than this secret cannot be revealed.

*

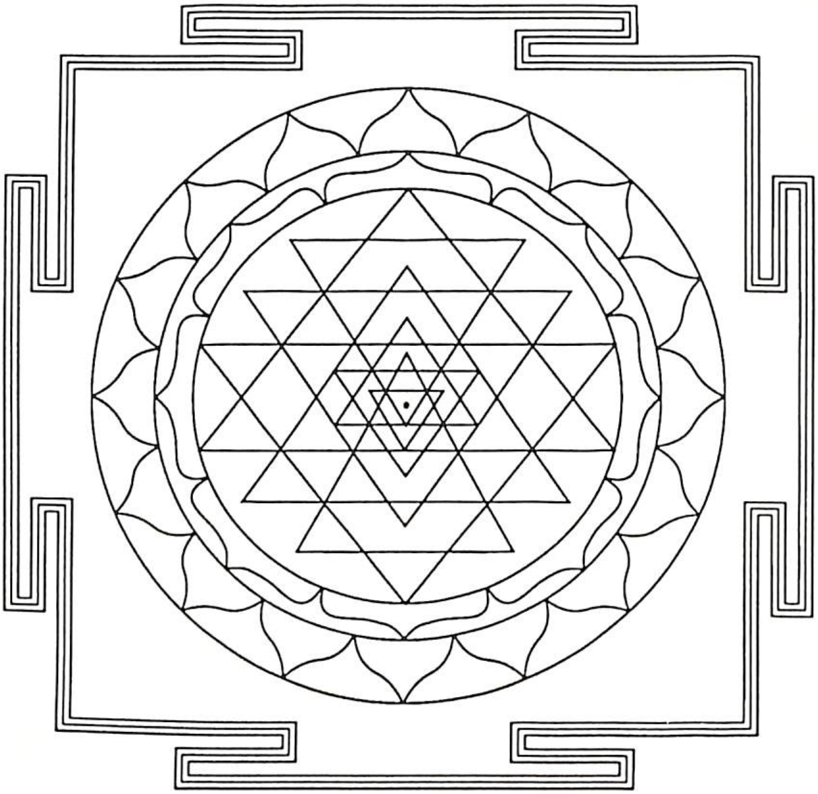
Thus the meaning of this great Upaniṣad of Tripurā even though it cannot be revealed [truly in the written word] Śrī Bhāskararāya, a knower of the Agni [sacrifices of the Vedas], has partially stated for the sake of the learned. Thus Bhāskararāya's commentary on the *Tripurāmahopaniṣad* is complete. [Let there be] Prosperity!

APPENDIX

The Cakras of the Body and the Śrīcakra


kulasahasra
sahasradalapadma
ajñā cakra
lambikācakra
visśudhi cakra
anāhata cakra
maṇipūra cakra
svādhiṣṭhāna cakra
mūlādhara cakra
akulasahasra

The Six Cakras of the Body plus the kulasahasra, lambikacakra, and akulasahasra mentioned as part of the yoga of the Śrīvidyā school.



The śrīcakra according to Bhāskararāya's description in *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhaṣya*

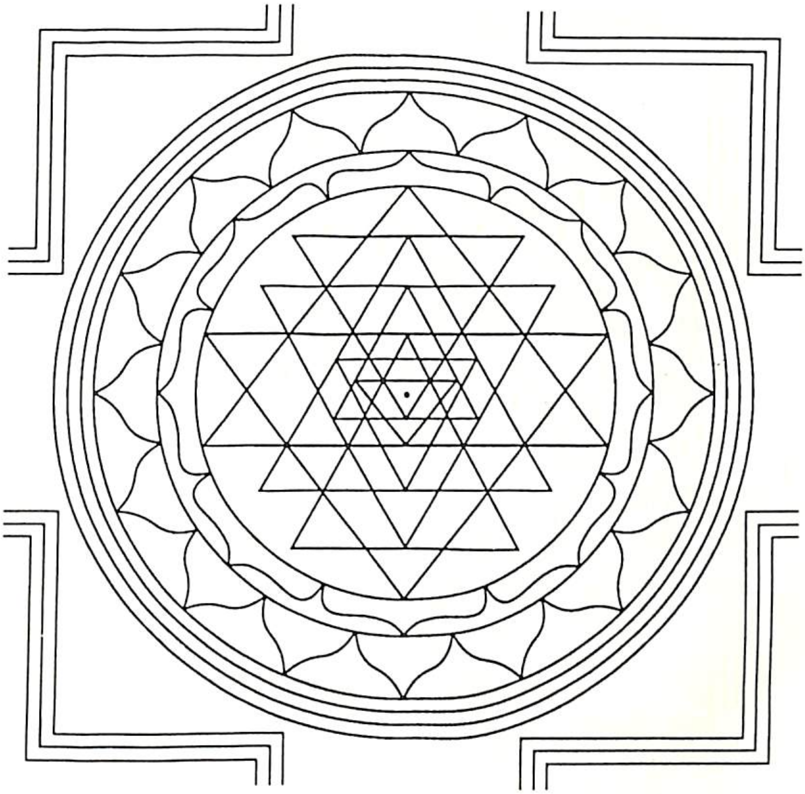


FIG. A. Śrīcakra: In the popular Kaula form

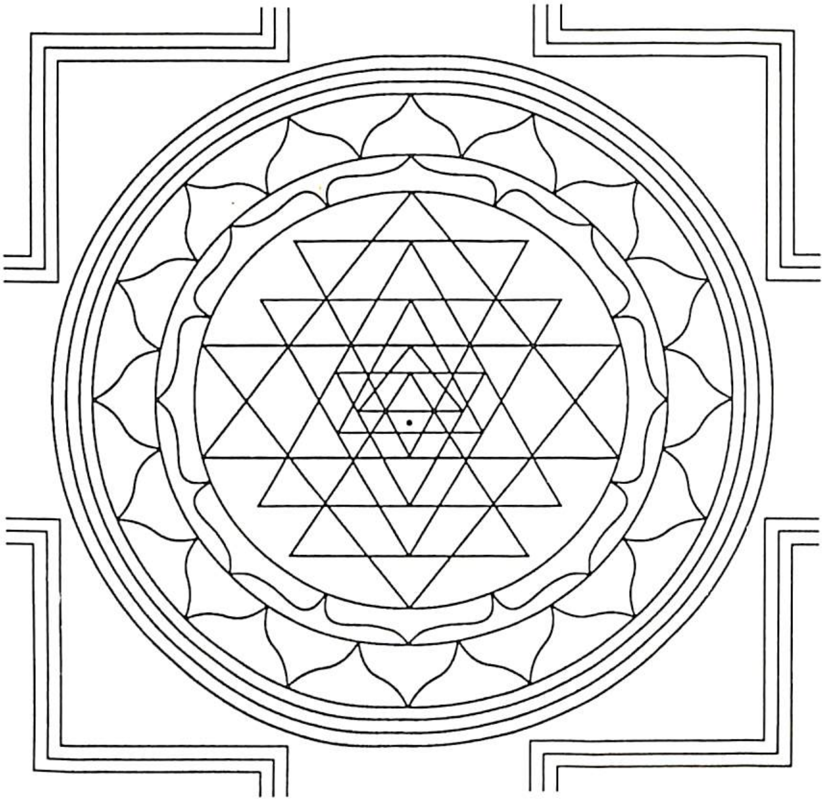


FIG. A1. Śrīcakra: In the "inverted" Samaya form proposed by Lakṣmīdhara

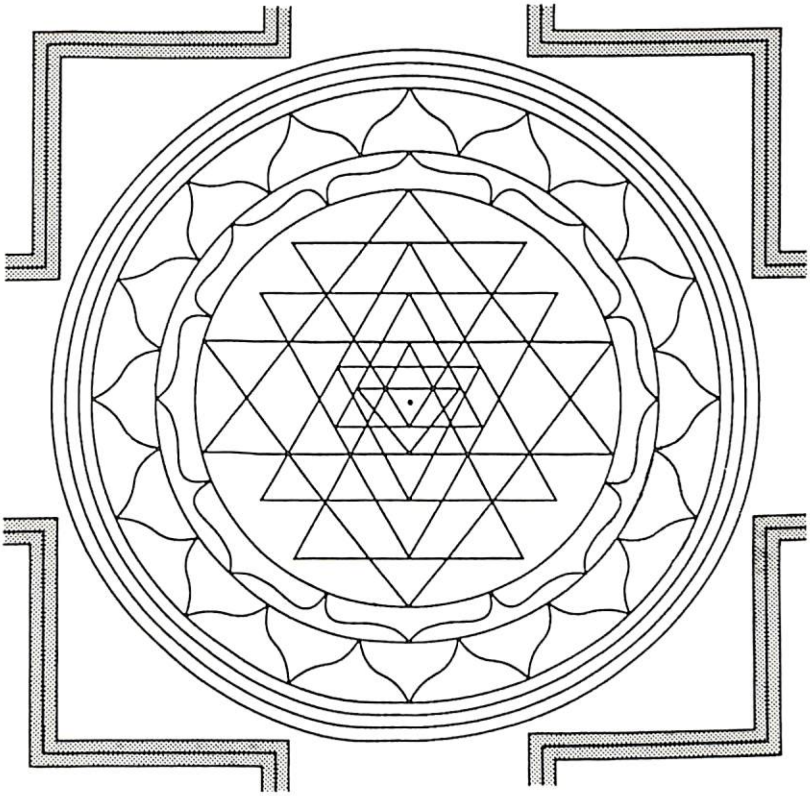


FIG. B. Periphery: *Trailokyamohana Cakra*

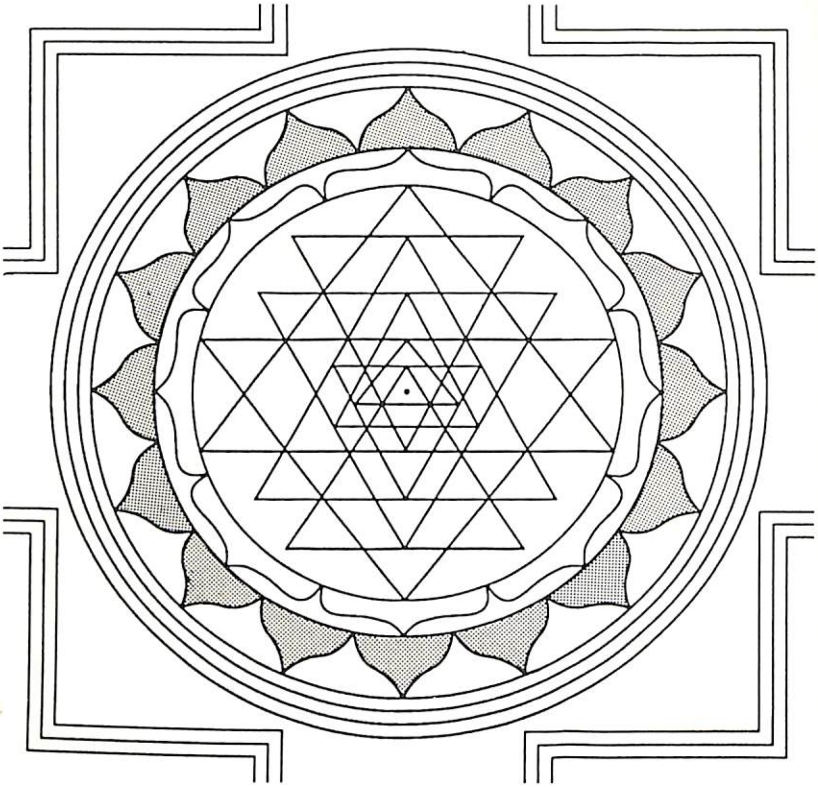


FIG. C. Sixteen-petalled Lotus: *Sarvāśāparipuraka Cakra*

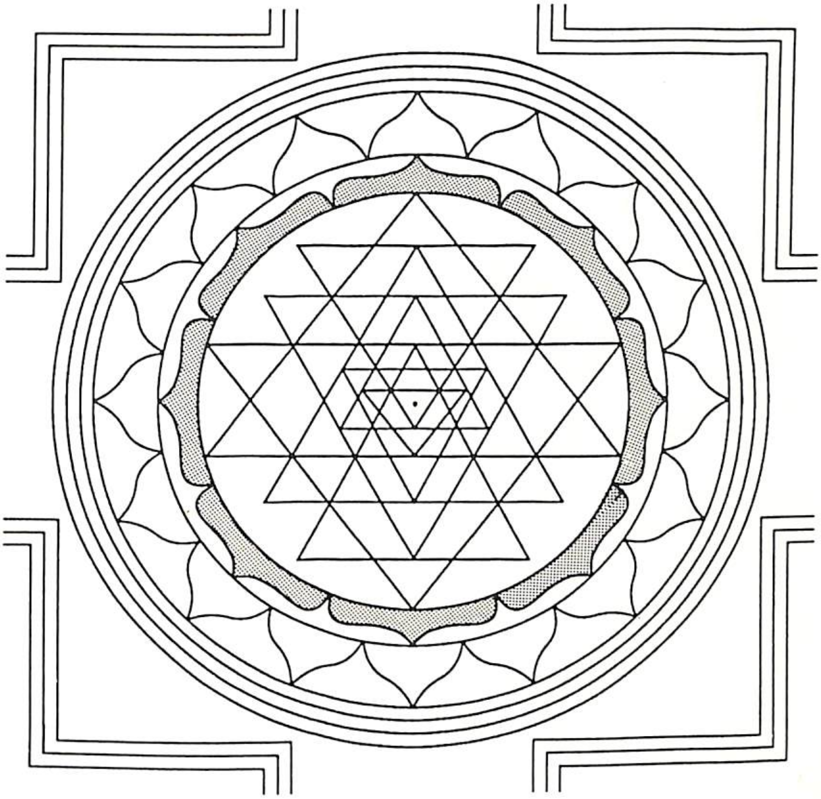


FIG. D. Eight-petalled Lotus: *Sarvasankṣobhaṇa Cakra*

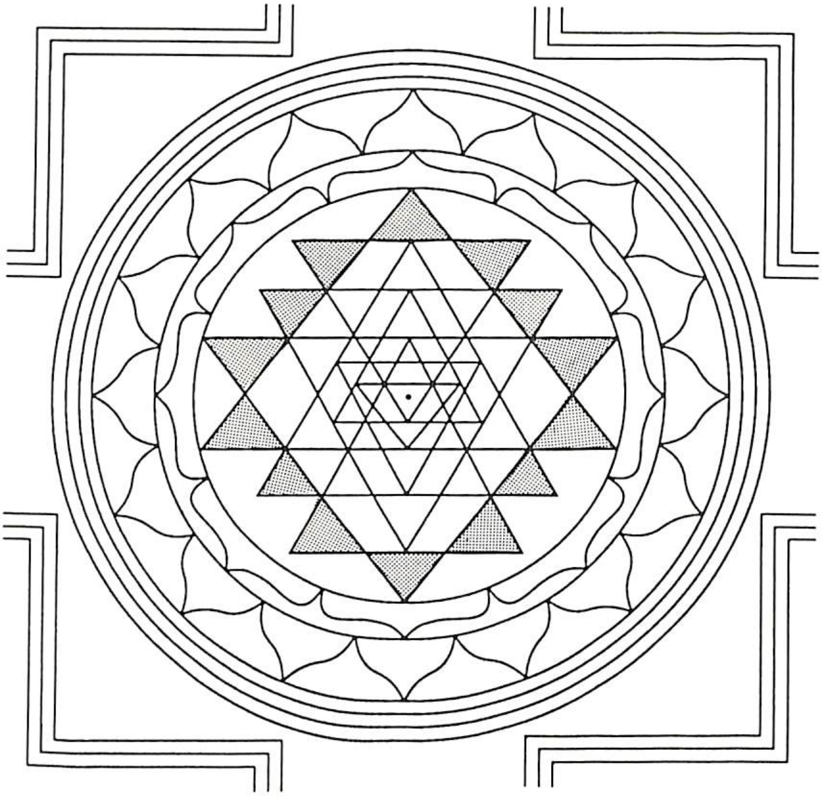


FIG. E. Fourteen triangles: *Sarvasaubhāgyadāyaka Cakra*

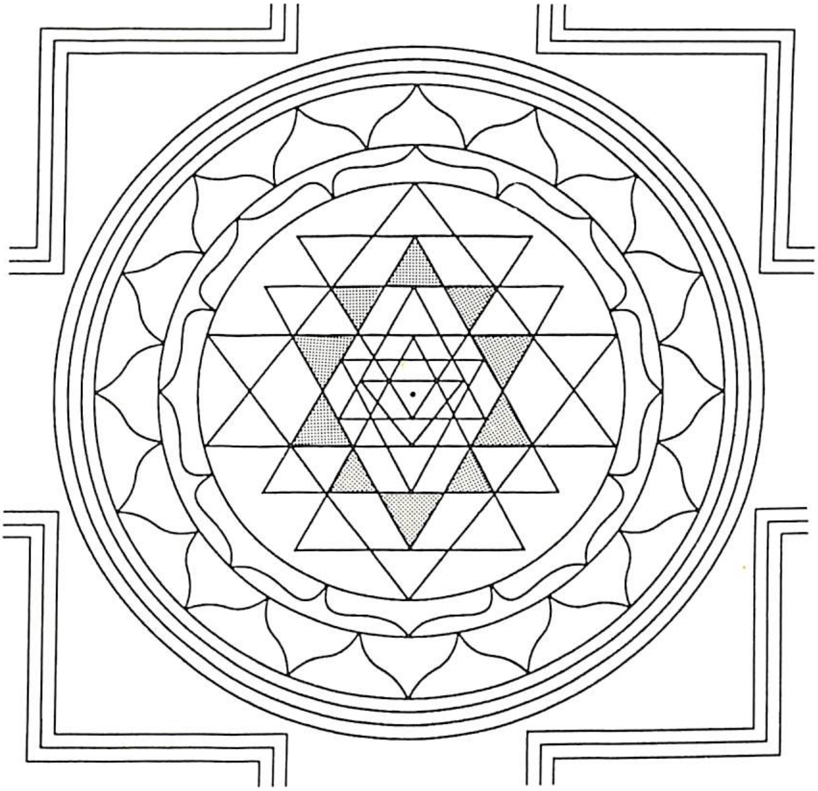


FIG. F. Ten triangles: *Sarvārthasādhaka Cakra*

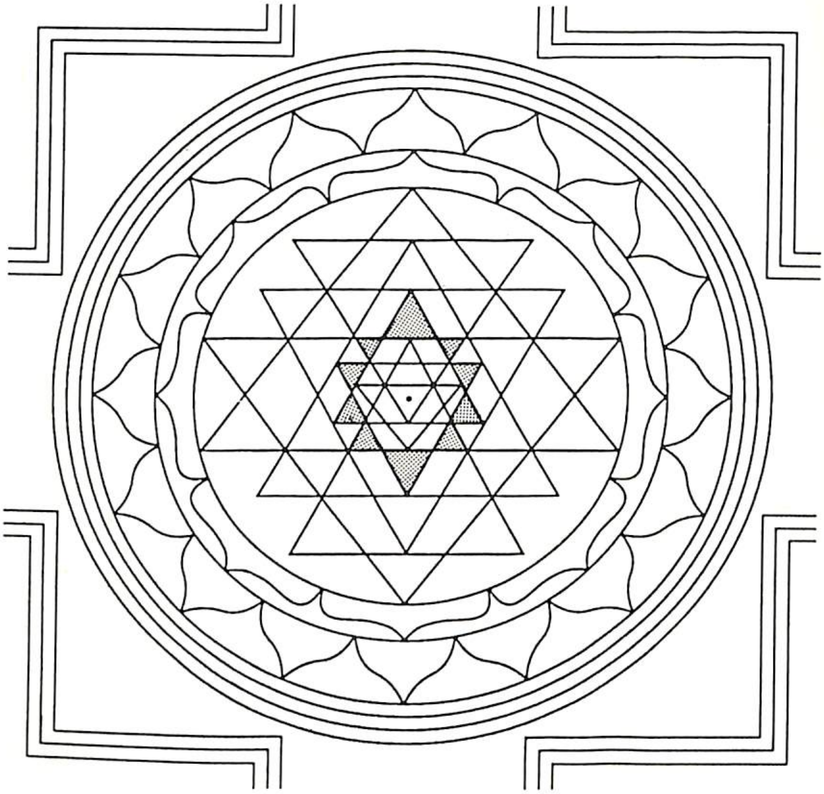


FIG. G. Ten triangles: *Sarvarakṣākara Cakra*

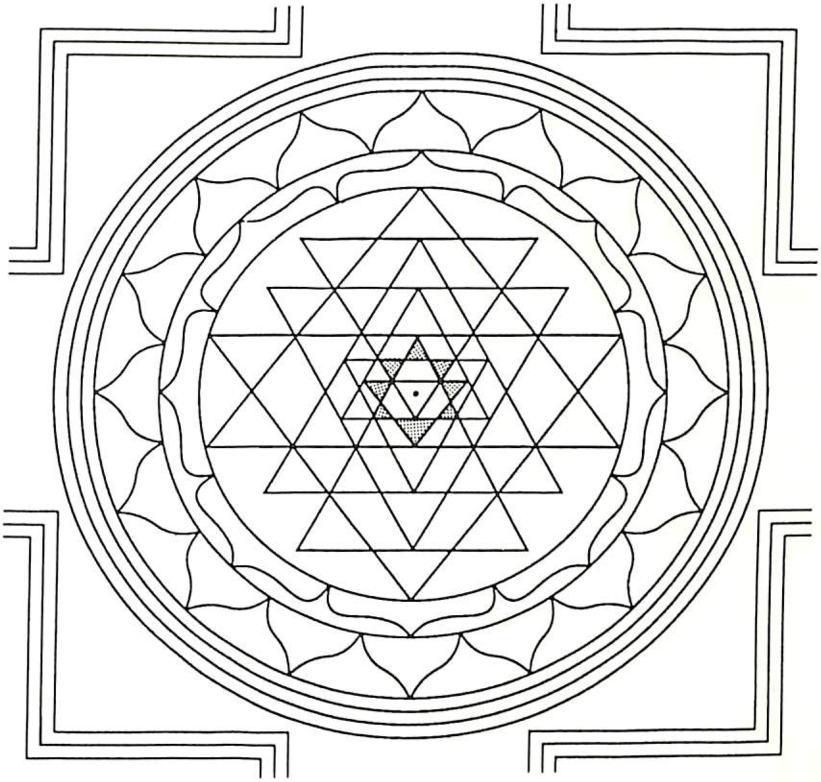


FIG. H. Eight triangles: *Sarvarogahara Cakra*

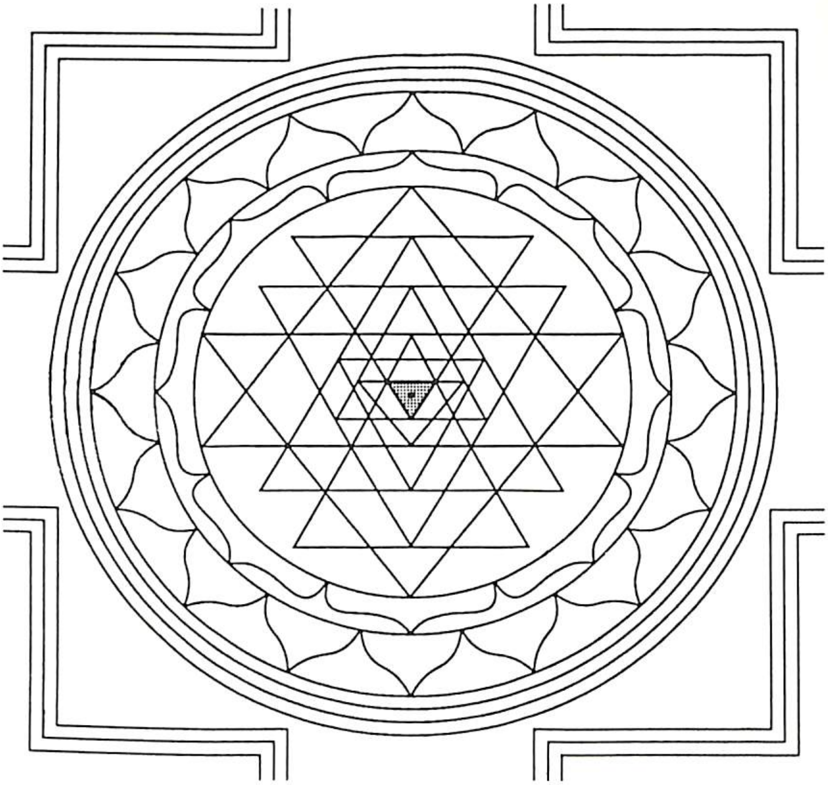


FIG. I. Triangle inverted: *Sarvasiddhiprada Cakra*

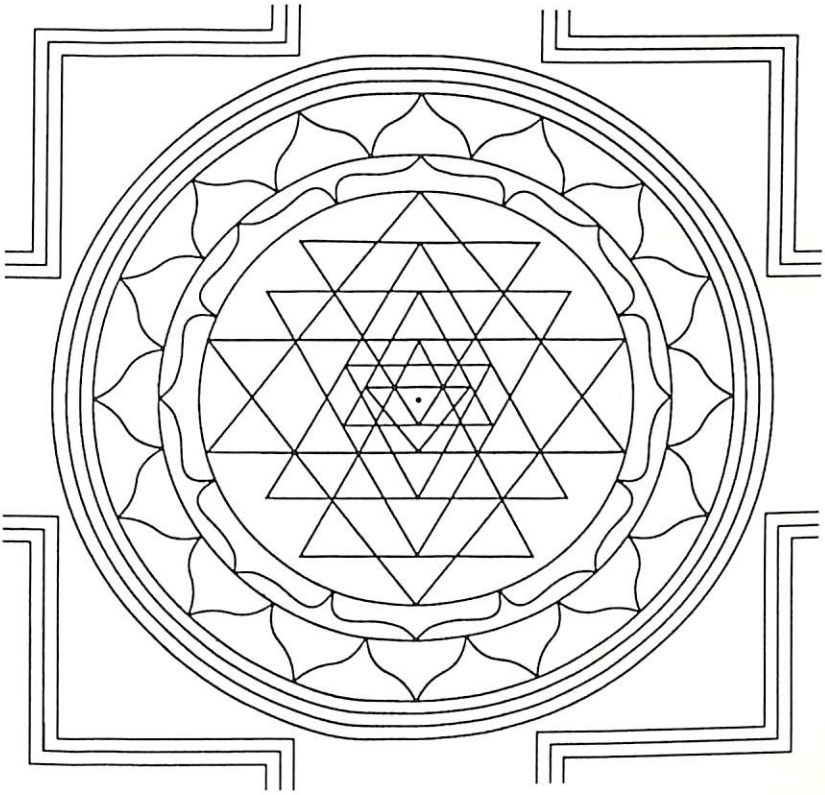


FIG. J. Point: *Sarvānandamaya Cakra*

Abbreviations

Sanskrit and Tamil Sources

JT	*Jñānārṇava Tantra*
KKV	*Kāmakalāvilāsa*
KT	*Kulārṇava Tantra*
LSN	*Lalitāsahasranāma*
LTS	*Lalitātriśatī*
LTSB	*Lalitātriśatībhāṣya*
MBh	*Mahābharata*
NS	*Nityotsava*
NSA	*Nityāṣoḍaśikārṇava*
PKS	*Paraśurāmakalpasūtra*
RV	*Ṛg Veda*
SL	*Saundaryalaharī*
TA	*Tantrāloka*
TM	*Tirumanitiram* of Tirumūlar
TR	*Tripurārahasya*
TTU	*Tripurātāpinī Upaniṣad*
TU	*Tripurā Upaniṣad*
TUbhāṣya	*Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya* of Bhāskararāya
TRT	*Tantrarāja Tantra*
VT	*Vāmakeśvara Tantra*
VVR	*Varivasyārahasya*
YH	*Yoginīhṛdaya*

Other Abbreviations

ABORI	Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute
ALB	Adyar Library Bulletin, Madras
ALS	Adyar Library Series, Madras
ASS/AnS	Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series, Poona
Bharati	*The Tantric Tradition*

BEFEO	*Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, Paris*
Coburn	"Scripture . . ."
CSS	Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series
Dyczkowski	*The Doctrine of Vibration*
Gnoli	*Luce delle Sacre Scritture*
Gonda	"The Indian Mantra"
GOS	Gaekwad Oriental Series
Graham	*Beyond the Written Word . . .*
HT	*Hindu Tantrism*
HTSL	*Hindu Tantric and Śākta Literature*
IHQ	*Indian Historical Quarterly*
IIJ	*Indo-Iranian Journal*
IOL-SB	*Catalogue of the Library of the India Office*, vol. 2
JA	*Journal Asiatique*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
KSS	Kāśī Sanskrit Series
KSTS	Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies, Śrīnagar
NCC	*New Catalogus Catalogorum*
Padoux I	*Recherches sur la symbolique et l'énergie . . .*
Padoux II	"Tantrism: An Overview," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*
Pandey	*Abhinavagupta: An Historical and Philosophical Study*
PEW	*Philosophy East and West,* Honolulu
PWSBT	Prince of Wales Saraswati Bhavan Texts, Varanāsī
RASB	Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal
Rastogi	*Krama Tantricism of Kashmir*
SBG	Saraswati Bhavan Granthamala
Śākta Upaniṣads	Translation and introduction by A. G. Krishna Warrier
Skt	Sanskrit
WZKS	*Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Sud-und Ostasiens, Wien*
ZDMG	*Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Leipzig, Wiesbaden*
ZMR	*Zeitschrift für Missionwissenschaft und Religionswiussenschaft, Münster, Westfalen*

Notes

Preface

1. The scholarly neglect of Hindu Tantrism and its treatment as an unwanted stepchild in the family of Hindu studies is not only a result of methodological problems, neither can it be attributed merely to traditional esotericism. Rather, Tantrism has been neglected or condemned because of a residual historical prejudice. Scholars have been unduly influenced by those whose ethical or theological traditions prohibit them from taking a critical approach. Conservative, non-Tantric Hindus, and others influenced by the christocentric attitudes that marked nineteenth-century Sanskrit scholarship reject Tantric texts and traditions as antinomian. To cite but one example, A. G. Krishna Warrier says in his introduction to his translation of the Śākta Upaniṣads, that *Tripurā Upaniṣad's* references to "certain objectionable rites" in verses 11 and 12 are "oblique" (which is certainly not the case) and suggests that "the way of worship alluded to is inferior and must therefore be eschewed at all costs." (See A.G. Krishna Warrier, *The Sákta Upaniṣad's*. [Adyar Madras: Adyar Library, 1967. Adyar Library Series, 89].) It appears that the more controversial aspects of Hindu Tantrism have been pushed to the peripheries of scholarly attention not only because they present formidable conceptual barriers but also for other reasons. Scholars have been reluctant to consider the *possibility* of Tantrism's pervasive and influential role in Indian religious history after the ninth century, C.E. for what appear to be personal, ethical, and emotional reasons. Tantrism's intellectual challenge to the moral and spiritual order of the high-caste Hindu status quo, its eroticism, and at times its "morally degenerate" forms of ritual practice have left some unwilling to admit it even as genuine religion. For others, these radical elements are Tantrism's main appeal and, in fact, its primary value. Following this line of interpretation, Tantrism is attractive to study or to practice because it is anti-establishment, sexually provocative, or, in some other way, eclectic.

2. Most notable are the recent excellent works by Thomas B. Coburn, David Kinsley, Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, and the contributions to the fine work edited by John Stratton Hawley and Donna B. Wulff, entitled *The Divine Consort: Rādha and the Goddesses of India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

Tantrism is usually consigned to the back pages of textbooks while its sectarian formulations are glossed over without serious consideration.

3. For example, Thomas J. Hopkins, in his introductory text on the Hindu religious tradition devotes less than two pages to Tantrism. This text, which, according to a recent survey, is used in over 80 percent of the introductory courses on Hinduism taught by members of the American Academy of Religion in universities and colleges, is hardly atypical.

The survey to which I refer was conducted in 1986–87 by members of a panel discussing the teaching of Hinduism in American colleges and universities. They presented their results at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Boston in November 1987. See also, Thomas J. Hopkins, *The Hindu Religious Tradition* (Encino and Belmont, Calif.: Dickenson Publishing Co., 1971).

Other recent studies in Hindu Tantrism center on Kashmiri Śaiva rather than Śākta traditions. Fine work has already been done in this area recently by Dyczkowski and Muller-Ortega, and previously by Silburn and Padoux. Śāktism per se does not even warrant its own entry in the recent *Encyclopedia of Religion,* ed. M. Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987). Rather, it is treated in a cursory manner under "Hindu Goddess Worship."

4. Recent works on Hindu Tantrism generally focus on either specialized topics of importance, such as yoga or mantra theory, or concentrate on describing Tantric literature and the themes and practices on which its sectarian forms are based. While these contributions should not be undervalued, they are designed for a specialized audience. The authors of these works assume their readers are scholars who need little introduction to the general field. The essential introductory tasks of definition and classification remain, as yet, inadequately addressed. Further, there has so far been no systematic effort to provide a theoretical footing for studying Tantrism in the context of comparative studies in religion.

5. The dual goals of introducing Tantric theology and practice and placing Tantrism within the broader context of Hindu thought are sought at the expense of a discussion of historical origins and practical developments. These latter topics, I believe, are tangential to understanding Tantrism's mature theological formulations and are better treated in a more comprehensive study. The best available overviews of Hindu Tantrism and Tantric and Śākta Literature have been done by Teun Goudriaan, Sanjukta Gupta, and Dirk Jan Hoens. The present study does not attempt to replace or simply to review these excellent, ground-breaking efforts. Rather, I intend to introduce the topic at a more elementary level and, at the same time, offer significant new materials and methods for Tantric studies. See Gupta et al., *Hindu Tantrism* (Leiden-Koln: E. J. Brill, 1979), and Goudriaan and Gupta, *Hindu Tantric and Śākta Literature.* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981). For a brief and up-to-date review of easily accessed bibliography, see also André Padoux "Hindu Tantrism: An Overview," *The Enclycopedia of Religion,* pp. 111–12.

The present study includes only as much anthropological field work on Tantrics as I thought necessary to explain historical and textual traditions.

6. *HTSL,* p. 12.

7. While a definitive history of Tantrism, including a discussion of its origins, has yet to be written, many authors have made able beginnings. See *HTSL* and *HT,* also the works of Dwiveda, Kaviraj, Bagchi, Chakravarti, and Bharati as listed in

the Bibliography. The most noteworthy work on so-called "right-handed" Tantra has been done by Dwiveda. See especially his articles in Sanskrit appearing in V. V. Dwiveda, *Tantra-Yātra, Essays on Tantra-Āgama Thoughts and Philosophy, Literature, Culture and Travel* Varanasi: Ratna Publications, 1982.

8. The present study leaves for future consideration the influence of Tantrism on the larger Hindu tradition. Instead I shall concentrate on one particular Tantric school's relations with "Vedic" and non-Tantric Hindu traditions.

9. In particular see Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

10. The discussion of "orthodoxy" can be extremely misleading. I use the term without suggesting either a technical meaning or the views of any particular Indian thinker or group. Thus I imply only that there are generally accepted or traditional formulations that we might agree reflect the "correct opinion" (Greek, *doxa*) of a substantial number of historical interpreters. If such a view seems nebulous, one can, for the purposes of the present discussion, take the views presented by Manu as the *locus classicus* of "orthodox" Hindu Dharma. I mean, however, to use the term in a general way to refer to those ideas and practices that scholars usually agree reflect the ideas of "the brahman tradition." Cf. D. H. H. Ingalls, "The Brahman Tradition," in *Traditional India: Structure and Change,* ed. Milton Singer (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1959).

11. The distinction between so-called right-handed (*dakṣiṇācāra*) or Samayācāra and the left-handed (*vāmācāra*) or Kulācāra (or Kaulācāra) Tantric traditions as it is popularly understood is a view propounded by Lakṣmīdhara, among others. The basis of the distinction—at least according to Lakṣmīdhara—is whether one admits the radical and antinomian elements of Tantric practice into the tradition. The puritanical Samayācārin Lakṣmīdhara rejects outright any use of the so-called five m's (wine, meat, fish, fermented grains, and sexual intercourse) or the erotic forms of meditation such as the much-discussed *kāmakalādhyāna* (cf. *HT,* pp. 145f.). Bhāskararāya, on the other hand, not only admits but advocates strongly the use of these Kaula Tantric elements and fits squarely within the so-called left current (*vāmācāra*) of Tantrism. As Goudriaan points out, the Kaula tradition totally subsumes the right/left distinction. (For a full discussion of this and other traditional Tantric methods of classification, see *HT,* pp. 43ff.) Yet Bhāskararāya does not accept Lakṣmīdhara's left/right distinction and instead sees this issue as a technical matter regarding Tantric forms of yoga. (See Douglas Renfrew Brooks, "The Śrīvidyā School of Śākta Tantrism: A Study of the Texts and Contexts of the Living Traditions in South India," Ph. D. dissertation [Harvard University, 1987]). (On the meaning of Kula according to Bhāskararāya, see his remarks on *LSN* names 90–96, Sastry translation pp. 88–90; on the term "Samaya," see *LSN* names 97–98, Sastry translation pp. 90–91; on the right/left distinction see *LSN* name 912, Sastry translation, pp. 345–51.) On *LSN* name 912 Bhāskararāya writes:

> There are two paths in the worship, the right hand and the left hand path. The left hand path means he should always meditate upon his own deity (Devī) in all ceremonies as Agnihotra, etc. described in the Vedas or in the ceremonies such as Āṣṭakā, etc. enjoined in the Smṛtis or in the *mantra, siddhis,* etc. described in the Tantras, whatever chief

> deities or secondary deities are invoked he should add his own deity; that is (in every ceremony) one should add or repeat his particular or chosen deity after repeating the deities which belong to each *mantra.* He who goes by this path will have with him the sin as he does not discharge his (three) debts to Devas, *ṛsis* and *pitṛs*. But in the right hand path, in the place of the deities of the ceremonies as enjoined in the Śruti and other works, his chosen deity [*sic*] (i.e. the deity whom he worships) should be necessarily substituted and worshipped. As he observes all the rites described in different scriptures, as described above (i.e. he worships his chosen deity) in the place of others deities of different ceremonies, he has no sin with him of that (left hand path) as he has discharged the debts of Devas, etc. by the meditation on one supreme god. Hence he attains *mokṣa* soon. But in the *vāmā* path (he attains *mokṣa*) slowly; because there is an obstruction for a certain period of time in his way as he has not discharged the debts of gods, etc. . ." (Sastry translation, p. 348)

Historically speaking, the so-called right-handed traditions as they are popularly understood are a minority view in Tantrism. Despite Bhāskararāya's professed Kaula views or left-hand traditions, it still seems appropriate to regard his version of Śrīvidyā as part of the conservative currents in Tantrism: he is at pains to reconcile his positions with the Vedic traditions and presents himself not in opposition to Vedic views or as an alternative but as their esoteric fulfillment. Inasmuch as the Śrīvidyā school advocates continuity between Vedic and Tantric traditions, it should rightly be construed a "right-handed" practice.

12. *HTSL,* pp. 169f.

13. For a list of Bhāskararāya's works and a brief biography, see the Introduction in *Varivasyārahasya and Its Commentary Prakāśa by Śrī Bhāskararāya Makhin,* 4th ed., edited with an English translation by Pandit S. Subrahmanya Shastri. (Adyar Library and Research Centre: Adyar, Madras, India, 1976). It is not yet clear that the extant works listed by Sastri actually exist. I have not, for example, been able to locate a copy of Bhāskararāya's purported commentary on the *Saubhāgyaratnākara.*

14. A fuller discussion of the Kula and Kaula traditions is undertaken by others. Kaulism is an especially important part of Kashmiri Śaivism and Śaiva Āgamic tradition and can be distinguished doctrinally from Trika and Krama traditions. However in the Śākta Tantras the technical and doctrinal meanings of Kaulism are all but lost, especially in later writers. What is important is the fact that Kaula traditions admit into their practice the most controversial Tantric elements and insist that these elements are vital to successful Tantric *sādhana*. For a discussion of the term "Kaula," see Dyczkowski and K. C. Pandey, *Abhinavagupta, An Historical and Philosophical Study,* 2d ed. (Varanasi: Chaukhamba Publication, reprint 1963).

15. The reader might review, for example, A. G. Krishna Warrier's remarks in his introduction to his translation of Śākta Upaniṣads. Here the learned author attempts to "rescue" the pristine Advaitic views espoused in the Śākta Upaniṣads from the "evil repute [of] a somewhat antique system of worship whose

degradation had been brought about, in course of time, by the admixture of certain unhealthy practices" (p. xiii). Krishna Warrier completely ignores Bhāskararāya's commentaries in favor of views more acceptable to conservatives like himself. Thus, for example, he says that *Tripurā Upaniṣad's* references to "certain objectionable rites" in verses 11 and 12 are "oblique" and points out, following Upaniṣad-brahmayogin, the non-Tantric commentator, "that the way of worship alluded to is inferior and must therefore be eschewed at all costs" (p. xiii). It is clear, however, that, in fairness to Śrīvidyā, the historian cannot simply ignore or dismiss Bhāskararāya and other Kaula Tantrics as perverted. Krishna Warrier's views represent what is perhaps the dominant interpretative ethos among contemporary conservative Śrīvidyā adepts in South India.

16. I follow Durkheim's definition of the "sacred" here. (See Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* translated from the French by Joseph Ward Swain [New York: The Free Press, 1915], pp. 52f.) My point is that we shall grasp the sacred character of the text not by assuming, as proponents may assume, that it is some characteristic quality of its words, sounds, or ideas. Rather, we shall grasp that which is sacred about the text when it is understood in relation to other ideas or objects that are regarded as sacred and juxtaposed to the profane. Thus, we designate the Upaniṣad "scripture" in order to classify it in relation to other texts that do not function as sacred for Tantrics, though we might also understand its sacred nature by comparing it to other objects or concepts that the Tantric considers sacred, such as the ritual act of contemplative worship (*upāsana*). The idea simply is that the sacred nature of text is not some quality per se that it possesses but that it is a function of its use by those for whom it is sacred. That certain Tantrics believe the Upaniṣad to be sacred entails their attribution of "sacred" qualities. But from the standpoint of the historian of religion, these distinguishing "sacred" characteristics are a function of the treatment of the text by its proponents. The translator then must come to some understanding of the text not only to interpret and "match" the vocabulary of two languages but to grasp the sacred nature attributed to the text *as a whole* by those for whom it is significant. In the present case, understanding the sacred quality of the text entails a preinterpretive awareness of Bhāskararāya's reading of *Tripurā Upaniṣad* as *śruti* as well as insight into the interpretive agendas of those contemporary adepts who read Bhāskararāya's commentary. Without these considerations in mind I believe the translator has no historical bench marks and no way of deciding on the meaning of the text, except on purely philological grounds. In the case of a Tantric work such as *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya,* philology alone will produce a purely abstract and historically incommensurate interpretation. This topic is further discussed in the Conclusion.

17. Malcolm David Eckel, *Jñānagarbha's Commentary on the Distinction Between the Two Truths, An Eighth Century Handbook of Madhyamaka Philosophy* (SUNY Press: Albany, New York, 1987), Introduction, p. 9.

18. A more complete discussion of the relationship between Śrīvidyā and Śāṅkara tradition is forthcoming. For an extended discussion of Tantric textual sources in the Śāṅkara tradition, see Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," pp. 130–47.

Part One, Introduction

1. As J. A. B. van Buitenen has noted. See his "On the Archaism of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*," in Milton Singer, ed., *Krishna: Myths, Rites and Attitudes* (Honolulu: East-West Center, 1966), pp. 35–36.

2. *HTSL*, p. 1.

3. The etymology of "Tantra" is taken up in nearly every work on the subject. See *HT*, p. 5, or Bharati, p. 16; also see Bharati's discussion of Tantric terminology (chap. 2). The *Kulārṇava Tantra* offers a series of esoteric etymologies as part of its presentation. The point to be emphasized (that is sometimes overlooked) is the simple fact that many Tantrics, including such writers as Bhāskararāya, knew perfectly well that the Tantra's esoteric etymologies were not grammatically sound. Criticism leveled at "false etymologies" (cf. Winternitz, *Geschichte der indischen Literatur*) misses the Tantric's point: the semantic meaning of language is only a superficial aspect of its ontic reality—even ordinary language, i.e., not mantric language, has hidden levels of meaning and power that can be appropriated by the initiated Tantric. For a more complete discussion of the distinction between ordinary language and mantra, see Gonda.

4. Cf., *HT*, pp. 11f. As we proceed, it will become clear that I intend to restrict the discussion further to the field of Śākta-Śaiva Tantrism. These traditions should be understood as part of the larger set of Tantric Hindu sectarian theological formulations, including Śaiva Āgama, Pāñcarātra Saṃhitā, Kashmiri-based Śaiva Tantra/Āgama, and other related Hindu Tantric traditions such as Śaiva Siddhānta.

5. This assertion is thoroughly documented in the study of living traditions presented in Brooks, *The Śrīvidyā School*.

6. One such example is the *Saubhāgyaratnākara* of Śrīvidyānandanātha. This text is, in large part, a ritual handbook that, for technical reasons, could not have been performed in the ways it is presented. The author's intent, it seems, was to elaborate on specific themes, concepts, and ritual symbols that enrich the interpretation of Śrīvidyā's most sacred elements, the *śrīcakra* and *śrīvidyā* mantra.

7. *HTSL*, pp. 11–12.

8. Without a consideration of the relation between texts and traditions, a given work remains merely literature and not a sacred scripture for a religious community, a source of intellectual speculation and not a part of historical religious tradition.

9. I have in mind the various classifications of Tantric traditions by *mata, ācāra, krāntā, krama, āmnāya,* etc. Goudriaan gives an accurate summary in *HT*, pp. 40f.

10. See *HTSL*, pp. 2f. for a discussion of the neglect of Hindu Tantrism in scholarly circles and for a brief history of scholarship.

11. See Mark S. G. Dyczkowski's fine study *The Canon of the Śaivāgama and the Kubjikā Tantras of the Western Kaula Tradition* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987). He begins by circumscribing the Śaiva Āgamas and Kashmiri Śaivism as his own area and topic of interest. He notes, as does Goudriaan (cf. *HT*), that Śrīvidyā is more well-known and regionally diffuse than the *Śaivāgama,* and in this sense, I

would add, probably more representative of catholic Tantrism as it is theologically and practically developed throughout India. (See above, p. 3.) Furthermore, Śrīvidyā writers, despite their avowed sectarianism, cross doctrinal lines in order to make textual citations and raise issues of general concern to Tantrism. This broad intellectual base of tradition becomes abundantly clear as we consider Bhāskararāya's commentary on *Tripurā Upaniṣad*. Here the commentator cites texts that cross the sectarian line between what are generally known as the *Śrīkula* Tantras, most of which are "acceptable" or doctrinally similar to Śrīvidyā sources, and the so-called *Kālīkula* Tantras concerned principally with horrific goddesses and topics normally outside the doctrinal purview of Śrīvidyā.

12. A lineage tradition may, for example, accept a text, concept, or practice on theoretical or ideological grounds and yet not make use of all the texts that touch on the subject. A given text may be unknown to the lineage or simply not admitted or included in the traditional corpus of teachings passed within it. Tantric gurus are the arbiters of tradition inasmuch as they determine which texts, concepts, and practices are actually passed on within a lineage. Yet because basic instruction and the teaching of scripture is directed to individual initiates considered to have different levels of qualification (*adhikāra*), a guru may decide to add or omit scriptures to meet the instructional needs of the student. Thus, the texts that are accepted by a lineage tradition theoretically may not necessarily be admitted into a scriptural tradition and those that are admitted may not necessarily be transmitted to each disciple of the guru's lineage. This means that scriptural canons are extremely fluid for Hindu Tantrics and that the notion of a "canon" of scripture is often very unclear when seen in light of the texts actually brought into a sectarian interpretation. This topic will be discussed further as we locate the *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya* in Śākta Tantric tradition.

13. The means by which Tantrics decide to admit or deny as scriptural a particular text or group of texts, or portion thereof (or any other form of teaching) are extremely complex and do not appear uniform. In other words, the criteria by which Tantrics decide what is actually scripture varies from sect to sect and from guru to guru. A discussion of this particular issue is forthcoming in another study.

14. By a "scriptural" tradition, I mean the particular scources, oral or written, deemed sacred within a particular religious tradition. For a further discussion of the definition of scripture, see Chapter 2.

For the purposes of the present dicussion the definition of religion follows the one presented by Emile Durkheim in his *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life:* "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." A text or tradition is "religious" when it functions within the bounded moral community as "sacred."

15. André Padoux makes this very observation a cornerstone to his brief but insightful exposition of Tantrism in the *Encyclopedia of Religion:* "Tantrism: An Overview," vol. 14: 111–12.

16. What is stated here as matter of fact will be a topic of careful scrutiny as we proceed. Bhāskararāya's erudition and liberality are legendary even among those

who disagree with his views. Like Abhinavagupta some eight centuries before him, he carefully reviews the variety of opinions and interpretive options open to him and treats his intellectual opponents generously. Having been raised in Maharastra, educated in Benares, and having lived in two different areas of the deep south, he not only had a cosmopolitan view of Hindu traditions but a broad exposure to regionally diffuse Śrīvidyā and Tantrism. In short, Bhāskararāya is both an intellectual of powerful acumen and a saint-cum-adept whose legacy remains an important part of contemporary Śrīvidyā in initiate and popular circles.

Chapter One

1. *Śākta Upaniṣads,* p. iv.

2. Cited in *Śākta Upaniṣads,* p. vi.

3. Both Yoga and Sannyāsa Upaniṣads have been edited and translated as part of the Adyar Library series. See T. R. Srinivasca Ayangar, trans., *The Yoga Upaniṣads,* ed. G. Srinivasa Murti (Adyar, Madras: Adyar Library Research Centre, 1938, 2d. ed., 1952); and *Yoga Upaniṣads with the Commentary of Śrī Upaniṣad-Brahma-Yogin,* ed. and trans. Mahadeva Sastri (Adyar, Madras: Adyar Library Research Centre, 1920). See also Eliade, *Yoga,* pp. 127–37; J. N. Farquhar, *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1920), p. 95.

4. *Śākta Upaniṣads,* pp. vif.

5. Farquhar, *Outline,* pp. 95f. While the task of constructing lists of specific sets of Upaniṣads within Śāktism may prove worthwhile as an aid to our broader understanding of their place within Hindu tradition, such an effort is beyond the scope of this study. Instead we shall focus on *Tripurā Upaniṣad* and its historical and theological relationship to other Śākta Upaniṣads and, more especially, as it has evoked comment from within the Hindu tradition.

6. For details, see n. 2 in the translation of *TUbhāsya*. A brief bibliographical history of the publication and translation of the Upaniṣads appears in Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature,* trans. V. Srinivasa Sarma (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), p. 223, n. 5. vol. 1. *Tripurā Upaniṣad* is included in the Nirnaya Sagar Press edition of 108 Upaniṣads published in 1913. More recent editions include *Upaniṣat-Saṃgrahaḥ, Containing 188 Upaniṣads,* Ed. with Sanskrit introduction by Prof. J. L. Sastri (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, reprint ed., 1980).

7. Thomas B. Coburn, "'Scripture' in India: Towards a Typology of the Word in Hindu Life," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52 (1984): 435–59; see also William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word, Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 67–77. On the views of the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā school regarding *śruti,* see Francis X. Clooney, "Why the Veda Has No Author: Language as Ritual in Early Mīmāṃsā and Post-Modern Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55 (1987): 659–84.

8. Clooney, "Language as Ritual."

9. A text may be inerrant without being infallible. For example, any text may be free from errors but not be considered incapable of error. Certainly, Bhāskararāya believes the Vedic texts to be both inerrant and infallible. They are

inviolate in the sense of being complete and not subject to revision, except inasmuch as their contents are open to interpretation.

10. As many contemporary high-caste Hindus do. During my research in India for the present study, a brahman pundit within the Adyar Library in Madras remarked that this Upaniṣad was not truly part of the *śruti* but merely a "late" text that used "Upaniṣad" as part of the title in order to gain "standing." This sentiment was echoed by others within the Śrīvidyā sect who rejected the Upaniṣad's Kaula Tantric contents as outside the purview of the Veda. See also Warrier's remarks in *Śākta Upaniṣads,* pp. viif. To counter this view, a significant portion of the Śrīvidyā adepts with whom I had contact were fully convinced that *Tripurā Upaniṣad* is an ancient work (on the basis of its archaic language) and *śruti.*

11. Interestingly, the notion that this and other comparable texts are historically late and therefore not a part of the Vedic corpus is an argument advanced mostly by Western scholars (see *HTSL,* p. 20). This criticism is not a matter of concern to contemporary Indian writers. Rather, Hindus generally reject the Tantric Upaniṣads on the grounds that they fail to live up to the moral standards of the Veda. This interpretation is itself a normative theological position, given the fact that "morally questionable" forms of animal sacrifice, which so commonly occur in Vedic literature, do not evoke the same reaction from Vedic proponents. Upaniṣadbrahmayogin, for example, rejects the Kaula Tantric elements in *Tripurā Upaniṣad* for twice-born persons and claims them to be inferior. (See *Śākta Upaniṣads,* p. xii and Upaniṣadbrahmayogin's commentary on v. 11.)

12. Cf. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature,* 1, pp. 225f.

13. *HTSL,* p. 11 n. 45.

14. *HTSL,* p. 20 n. 95.

15. Among contemporary Śrīvidyā adepts in South India, there are those who maintain that the additional qualification for Tantric teaching is necessary for twice-born Hindus who would otherwise be entitled to study the Upaniṣad. Others maintain that all twice-born Hindus are qualified to read the Upaniṣad as *śruti* but will be able to understand only its superficial meanings since they do not qualify for Tantric initiation. However, none of the Śrīvidyā adepts I encountered believed that non-twice-born initiates were prevented from studying the Upaniṣad on the grounds of its being *śruti.* The non-twice-born's "additional" qualification for Tantric teachings made him or her an exception to the usual rule of limiting Vedic texts to twice-born males.

16. This phenomenon is actually quite common. Often works clearly associated with Tantric traditions have "tantra" appended to their original titles. One of the best examples is the addition of "tantra" to the famous *Nityotsava,* the ritual handbook composed (or compiled) by Umānandanātha, the best-known disciple of Bhāskararāya. For other examples, see Goudriaan, *HTSL,* p. 7.

While studies of Tantric literature have observed that Tantric tradition includes a broad range of oral and written materials that never explicitly call themselves "Tantras," including Upaniṣads, none have yet addressed adequately either this remarkable situation in which Tantric texts take on Vedic names or the broader relationship between Tantric sources and the Vedic tradition.

17. For a brief discussion of the distinction between Tantra and Veda, see *HT,* pp. 15f.

18. For remarks on Upaniṣadbrahmayogin's commentaries, see *Śākta Upaniṣads,* p. xiii.

19. Cf. Thomas J. Hopkins, *The Hindu Religious Tradition,* pp. 15f. For the purposes of the present discussion the "Vedic" tradition refers to those oral or written sources passed among individuals and communities that identify themselves implicitly or explicitly as such; in short, any text or individual that would identify itself as "belonging to the Veda" (*Vaidika*). Likewise, we may accept at this point, provisionally, a similar kind of self-description as an operative definition of the term "Tantric" (*Tāntrika*).

20. Lakṣmīdhara, for example, objects to the term (see his remarks on *SL,* v. 11) as do many contemporary adepts, who object on the grounds that the term "Tantric" suggests moral lassitude or the practice of "black magic." Nevertheless, as we shall demonstrate here, it is entirely justified to call these traditions "Tantric." See Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," pp. 420ff.

21. See Gnoli, *Luce,* pp. 12f and Goudriaan, *HTSL,* pp. 8–9.

22. Cf. *HT,* p. 15.

23. *HT,* p. 15. While some historical Tantrics reject outright the teachings of the Vedic traditions as utterly useless and lacking in efficacy for the present age, these more radical anti-Vedic Tantrics are beyond the present study's concerns. I would further suggest that the anti-Vedic Tantrics represent a distinctly different historical movement within Tantrism: a movement that is predominantly vernacular-language-based and antibrāhmaṇical, contrasting sharply with the Tantrism generally represented in Sanskrit sources. We will concentrate on ways in which Tantric and Vedic traditions have commingled and yet remain distinctive.

24. While claims from within Tantrism to spiritual and religious continuity should remain an important factor in our understanding of Tantric theology, the dearth of evidence leads us to conclude that it is unlikely that direct historical continuity between Vedic and Tantric traditions will ever be conclusively established.

25. Brian K. Smith, "Exorcising the Transcendent: Strategies for Redefining Hinduism and Religion," *History of Religions* (August 1987), p. 40.

26. One particularly interesting example of this situation is Rāmeśvara Sūri's commentary on the *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra* in which the author goes to some lengths to describe and distinguish when (and for whom) the respective Vedic and Tantric rites prescribed apply. It is also worth noting that Rāmeśvara claims to be in the direct lineage of one of Bhāskararāya's disciples, though clearly this is not Umānandanātha, whom he frequently criticizes as misrepresenting Bhāskararāya's views. See the *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra* with the commentary of Rāmeśvara Sūri entitled *Saubagyodaya,* ed. A. M. Sastri and S. Y. Dave (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1950), 2d ed. (GOS 22).

27. Cf. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 56–57.

28. I have in mind Durkheim's definition of religion quoted in n. 14, Introduction, above.

29. Cf. Coburn, " 'Scripture' in India," for a discussion of the *śruti/smṛti* typology.

30. Bhāskararāya makes this claim in his *Varivasyārahasya* (*VVR,* 1.7) and again in the *Setubandha* on *Vāmakeśvara Tantra. Ṛg Veda,* 5.47.4 reads: *catvāra īṃ bibhrati kṣemayantaḥ,* which literally means, "the four [priests], desiring benefit for themselves, worship [this god]." Bhāskararāya gives the standard Śrīvidyā interpretation (which is repeated by the other major commentators on *VT*) when he says it means "that which contains the four *īṃs* confers benefit." The four *īṃs* here refer to the four occurrences of the letter *ī* in the *kādi pañcadaśākṣarī,* that is, in the 15-syllable *śrīvidyā* mantra, namely, the *ī* in the first *kūṭa* and the three *ī* vowels occurring within the *hrīṃs* at the end of each *kūṭa.*

31. *PKS,* 1.30.

32. *PKS,* 1.30; see Rāmeśvara's remarks on p. 42.

33. For a discussion of the Upaniṣads as "secret" (*rahasya*), see Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature,* p. 225. "Secret" Tantric sources include such works as Tantras, speculative monographs, and ritual digests.

34. This discussion of the Hindu socioreligious order is based fundamentally on Dumont's ground-breaking works. See Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: the Caste System and Its Implications,* trans. Mark Sainsbury (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970). However, unlike Dumont, who would separate political from religious considerations, I believe the evidence demonstrates clearly that in the Indian situation these elements should not be treated as discrete categories. Tantrics have ingratiated themselves with political rulers whose affect on the social, religious, and ethical mores of Indian society is profound. Bhāskararāya offers just such an example, as we shall see in the discussion below.

35. When treating the subject in general one is undoubtedly vulnerable to a certain ahistorical criticism like that leveled against Eliade. This is precisely why the present work focuses on the historical interpretations of a single Tantric.

36. See *TUbhāṣya,* v. 1.

37. *TUbhāṣya,* v. 12.

38. *HT,* pp. 33–34.

39. The notion of the "double norm" is, as Goudriaan points out (*HT,* p. 9), one of Sir John Woodroffe's best insights. (See John Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shakta. Essays and Addresses on the Shakta Tantrashastra* [Madras: Ganesh and Co., reprint of 8th ed., 1975], p. 137; and Ch. Chakravarti, *The Tantras: Studies on Their Religion and Literature* [Calcutta: University Press, 1963], p. 4; references from *HT,* p. 9).

40. For an elaboration on this discussion of human authorship, the *apauruṣeya* concept and the definition of the Veda, see the recent works of Brian K. Smith and Francis X. Clooney listed in the Bibliography.

41. *Śākta Upaniṣads,* p. vi.

42. Cf. *Upaniṣat-Saṃgrahaḥ, Containing 188 Upaniṣads,* ed. with Sanskrit introduction by Prof. J. L. Sastri (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, reprint edition, 1980).

43. On Lakṣmīdhara's works, see *HTSL,* pp. 147f.

44. Śākta Tantrism does not follow the technical distinction elaborated by Abhinavagupta in which Tantric traditions are divided according to Trika, Krama,

and Kaula lines. See Pandey, Rastogi, or Dyczkowski for discussion of the divisions within Kashmiri Śaiva Tantrism.

45. For a discussion of the term "Kaula" and its source, the related term "kula," see *HTSL*, pp. 18f. and Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," pp. 58f.—virtually every source on Tantrism discusses this central term. See also Pandey, Dyczkowski, Rastogi, Bharati, and Chakravarti as listed in the Bibliography. The historical problems surrounding the Samayācāra as a theoretical school and as a practical, historical tradition have not yet been raised seriously in scholarly circles. While its rather puritanical, intellectual, and contemplative dimensions have been noted, we are still left with at least two puzzling issues. First is the paucity of materials regarding its interpretation and practice. Other than Lakṣmīdhara and a little-known and obscure commentator by the name of Rāmānanda (or Rāmānandatīrtha) there do not appear to be any other like-minded historical proponents of the Samayācāra. While many writers share the brāhmaṇical moralism of Lakṣmīdhara, none take up his specific interpretive positions. This leads us to the second puzzling issue. There is no evidence that the Samayācāra, despite its emphasis on internalization of ritual (*antaryāga*), ever produced a viable method of interpreting the key element of Śrīvidyā theology, the *śrīcakra*. While Lakṣmīdhara most sharply contrasts the Samayācāra view with that of the Kaulas on practical and moral issues, he never addresses the rather obvious theological problems of interpretation involved when the *śrīcakra*—the central focus of all Śrīvidyā speculations—is "inverted" in the Samaya fashion. Since the *śrīcakra* is not a symmetrical diagram, certain important changes occur when it is, in the Samaya manner, "turned upside down" from the so-called Kaula positioning. This is not a trivial point: Samayins would have to refashion their entire cosmological picture of reality to meet the new situation arising as the major triangles are turned around. Further, the "laying down" (*nyāsa*) of deities (*yoginīs*) during contemplative worship (*upāsana*) would also need serious emendation. The problem appears abstract but is rather practical given the focus of Śrīvidyā tradition on internalized, contemplative yoga centering on the *śrīcakra*. The textual/historical discrepancy is simply that there are no extant sources and no indications by Lakṣmīdhara of what actually is done ritually with the yantra. We are left either to conclude that Lakṣmīdhara and his Samayācāra did not survive, that it was absolutely secretive, or that it produced only a theoretical interpretation of key Śrīvidyā elements with no corresponding practical formulations. In fact, contemporary Samayins—who are our only clue to the historical practice—do not follow Lakṣmīdhara's interpretation to the letter and do not create ritual handbooks to meet the rather special situation arising with the *śrīcakra*'s repositioning. While it is entirely possible that Samayācāra has within it any number of interpretations (depending on lineage transmissions), there is no reason to believe that its more practical formulations were anything more than reactionary, conservative responses to the already established and prevalent Kaula Śrīvidyā. The overwhelming majority of contemporary Śrīvidyā adepts in South India today, for example, follow Kaula texts and practices guided by puritanical Samayācāra morals but not by Samaya "conventions" of interpretation. For more on this topic see Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," p. 67f.

46. See Lakṣmīdhara's comment on *Saundaryalaharī,* v. 41, where he says regarding the Kaulas, "*atra bahu vaktavyaṃ asti tat tu avaidikamārgatvāt smaranarhaṃ api na bhavati,*" in *Saundaryalaharī of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya with the Commentary of Lakṣmīdhara* critically edited by Vidvan N. S. Venkatanathacharya (Mysore: Oriental Research Institute, 1969), p. 117.

47. This is a common tactic among contemporary adepts in South India who are usually willing and anxious to condemn the "immoral" views of the Kaula tradition but who would otherwise not like to comment on Śrīvidyā practices other than their own. This attitude seems to be based on the idea that Tantric *sādhana* is not only secret but essentially private. What adepts outside of one's lineage do or do not practice is not always of interest. During my field work in 1984–85, a significant number of adepts were incredulous that I would have an interest in the practices of Śrīvidyā adepts outside my "own lineage." What possible impact, they asked, would their practice or my investigation have on my own *sādhana*? See Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," pp. 335f.

48. This too is documented in recent field-work studies. One very well known modern adept, Cidānandanātha, from Madras, whose published works include Kaula prescriptions, is a frequent subject of conversation among contemporary adepts. Since his death, controversy and innuendo have surrounded his legacy: Did he practice the *pañcamakāra* literally? Did he perform the erotic *kāmakalādhyāna* in private? His own disciples disagree or in some cases will not respond to these "charges." Nevertheless, Cidānanda's reputation does not appear to have suffered significantly. His private publications, including translations into Tamil and commentaries in Tamil on Sanskrit works, have drawn a wide audience and are generally very well received even among those who vehemently disapprove of his Kaula positions.

49. See Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," p. 424f.

50. See Lakṣmīdhara's comments on verse 11 of the *Saundaryalaharī,* where he says, "In the case of worshipping the [śrī-] cakra [i.e., being a fully initiated Tantric] even the outcastes are competent. Just as [in the notion of] the priest and the tribal barbarian (*niṣādasthapati*) in which what applies to the priest (*sthapati*) is applicable to the tribal barbarian (*niṣāda*), likewise what is applicable to the Vaidikas, is applicable to outcastes. Nothing is lost [in allowing this]," *cakravidyopāsane śūdrānāmapi adhikāracodanāt niṣādasthapativat vaidike karmanyadhikārasiddheh na kācit ksatiḥ*. See *Saundaryalaharī with the Commentary of Lakṣmīdhara,* p. 42. As we shall see, Lakṣmīdhara, though he excludes the *pañcamakāra,* should be classified "Tantric" since he admits the possibility of non-twice-born initiates.

51. Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," p. 440. The idea that Lakṣmīdhara advocates the complete exclusion of non-twice-born persons from Tantric *sādhana* (and specifically from Śrīvidyā) has unfortunately been repeated by excellent scholars who, apparently, have not reviewed the original text carefully. No less an authority than Teun Goudriaan repeats this view in *HT,* p. 33.

52. Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," pp. 396f.

53. The case of Cidānandanātha cited above is just such an example.

54. See the Introduction to the *VVR,* p. xxi.

55. We have no doubt that Bhāskararāya advocated and likely practiced both Vedic and Tantric rites, distinguishing them but keeping them side by side without conflict. In his commentary to *Lalitāsahasranāma* he makes this clear in a description of the preparations for a certain type of *prayoga*. He says, "On an auspicious full moon day when the duration of the full moon lasts from sunrise to the whole of that day, get up at early morning, observe the caste rules in regard to daily rites enjoined in the Vedas and Tantras, fast the whole day; in the evening take a good and clean bath, perform Sandhyā and other daily Vaidika and Tāntrika rites, and go through the usual course of religious reading (*pārāyana*)." *LSN,* Sastry translation, p. 381.

56. Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," pp. 446f.

57. The legendary biography of Bhāskararāya is said to be a work of his disciple Umānandanātha. It forms the basis for Subrahmanya Shastri's remarks on Bhāskararāya's life in his introduction to the *VVR*. The text of the *Bhāskaravilāsa* is not fully translated and is included in the Nirnaya Sagar edition of the *Saubhāgyabhāskara on Lalitāsahasranāma.* See *Lalitāsahasranāma* (*stotra*) *with the Saubhāgyabhāskarabhāṣya of Bhāskararāya,* ed. M. K. Sastry (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1935).

58. On Bhāskararāya's biography, see *HTSL,* pp. 169f. Regarding the views of contemporary adepts, see Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," pp. 440ff.

59. Contemporary Vaidika Tantrics, who have reservations about Kaula elements, will either create an acceptable metaphorical interpretation involving ritual substitutions (*pratinidhi*) (which some contemporary Samaya adepts do but which Lakṣmīdhara does not) or they will reject outright Kaula scriptures and practices. Kaulism, these puritanical interpreters maintain, is beyond the legitimate purview of a Tantric tradition that is, as part of the Vedic legacy, without "corrupt" Kaula influences. Kaula Tantrics, however, resort to the double norm and thereby justify their religious positions without jeopardizing their social standings.

60. See *Saundaryalaharī* (with nine Sanskrit commentaries, Hindi and Tamil renderings of verses, translation and notes in English and Tamil [verses only], prayogas, yantras, etc.), ed. A. Kuppuswami (Mylapore, Madras: A. Kuppuswami, 1976).

61. Avalon, whose opinion is not critically reliable in this regard, also makes this statement in his introduction to *Kaula and other Upaniṣads with Commentary by Bhāskararāya,* ed. Sitarama Shastri (Introduction by Arthur Avalon, aka Sir John Woodroffe), Tantrik Texts, vol. 11 (Calcutta and London: Luzac, 1922), pp. 2f.

62. See his introductory remarks to *TUbhāṣya*. Note that he also refers to verses of the Upaniṣad as belonging to the Atharva Veda, in his commentary on *Lalitāsahasranāma.*

63. The "location" of the Upaniṣad as part of the "Sāṅkhyānakalpasūtra" is problematic. See Part Two, n. 2, below, for details.

64. See Avalon's introduction to *Kaula and Other Upaniṣads,* pp. 1f. as cited above.

65. Thus while the traditional assignment of a "place" within the Vedic schools is ambiguous and even obscure, the version of the text favored by Bhāskararāya is

beyond dispute. For information regarding the other commentaries on *Tripurā Upaniṣad,* see *New Catalogus Catalogorum. An Alphabetical List of Sanskrit and Allied Works and Authors,* by V. Raghavan (vols. 1–5); Dr. K. Kunjunni Raja (vols. 6ff.) (Madras: Madras University Press, 1949–); vol. 1 in revised ed., 1968. For a list of the commentators and editions available, see *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, Bibliography, Vol. 1,* comp. Karl H. Potter (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), p. 993.

66. *The Śākta Upaniṣad-s,* translated into English by A. G. Krishna Warrier (based mainly on the Commentary of Upaniṣad-Brahmayogin) (Adyar, Madras: The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1967). (Listed and abbreviated as *Śākta Upaniṣads.*)

67. On the life and works of Upaniṣadbrahmayogin, see Dr. V. Raghavan, *The Journal of the Music Academy,* vol. 27 (Madras, 1956), pp. 113–50. For a complete list of the published editions of Upaniṣadbrahmayogin's works, see Potter, *Bibliography,* pp. 458–60. The attribution of commentaries on 108 Upaniṣads is traditional; a total of ninety-six commentaries are now available in print.

68. See *Śākta Upaniṣads,* p. x.

69. Also appearing in the Sitarama Shastri edition of *Kaula and other Upaniṣads,* pp. 34–35. Bhāskararāya, who cites Appaya Dīkṣita as an authority on certain intellectual issues, makes no mention of this commentary.

70. The text has been edited by Mahesacandra Pala and is likely of north Indian origin. It is not known to exist in manuscript libraries in South India.

71. See Potter, *Bibliography,* p. 286.

72. The reference to this author's works appears in ibid., pp. 546–47.

73. The date listed by Potter in his *Bibliography* (see p. 420) appears to assume the attribution made by the compilers of the *New Catalogus Catalogorum.*

A version of the *Tripurā Upaniṣad* commentary which appears under the name Rāmānanda has recently been edited in Varanasi but differs significantly in substance from the manuscript version I have acquired from the Adyar Library in Madras (*Śrī Tripuropanishad with Two Bhāsyas,* ed. Acharya P. N. Pattabhirama Shastri [Varanasi: Veda Mīmāṃsā Research Centre, 1981]). This includes a reprint of the Sitarama Shastri edition's version of Bhāskararāya's commentary, though it does not represent itself as such, and the commentary of Rāmānanda. It may be the case that there are two authors bearing the name Rāmānanda who commented on the Upaniṣad, but it is also certain that the author of the Adyar Library version is also the author of the *Tripurātāpinī* commentary in the same collection.

74. See Pattabhirama Shastri edition as cited above, pp. 38f.

75. See Lakṣmīdhara on *SL,* v. 41.

76. Important also to note is that contemporary adepts in South India had no knowledge of the commentaries on *Tripurā* and *Tripurātāpinī Upaniṣads* attributed to Rāmānanda until I brought these to their attention. If Rāmānanda is a southern author, as several contemporary adepts maintained after reviewing the texts, then he appears to have little or no impact on the subsequent historical tradition. See Lakṣmīdhara on *SL,* v. 41.

77. Though it is clear from these references that Rāmānanda is a post-fifteenth-century figure, other commentators including Bhāskararāya, do not

mention his opinions. Thus, it is possible that Rāmānanda's commentary on *Tripurā Upaniṣad* was composed before that of Bhāskararāya and Upaniṣadbrahmayogin.

78. In the case of the *Tripurā Upaniṣad* he puts a further qualification on the text. He says clearly in his remarks on verse 15 that the Upaniṣad should be read in conjunction with the *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra* though he does not mention his own attributed but as yet unrecovered commentary. Either he had not yet written his *Ratnāloka* on *PKS* or the text is part of his legend (and of the imagination of his disciple Umānandanātha). It would seem appropriate to Śrīvidyā adepts that Bhāskararāya would write such a commentary on the foremost ritual guide to his tradition though apart from this attribution in the *Bhāskaravilāsa* (cited by Subrahmanya Sastri in his introduction to *VVR,* p. xxxii) there is no evidence that he actually did. Certainly no contemporary adepts with whom I have had contact know of this reputed commentary other than by the mention in the *Bhāskaravilāsa* and in Sastri's *VVR*.

79. The comment was made by Naṭarāja in 1984. For more on this adept and his lineage, see Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," 446ff.

80. For a further discussion of the role and place of the *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra* in Tantric history, see *HTSL,* pp. 150f.

81. It is worth noting here that Umānanda does not append Upaniṣads as liturgy to his *Nityotsava,* a *nibandha* or ritual handbook based on the *PKS*. This practice is common among contemporary south Indian Śrīvidyā adepts. *Tripurā Upaniṣad,* like a number of the Śākta Tantric Upaniṣads (*Devī-, Tripurātāpinī-,* and *Bhāvana-upaniṣads*), are frequently chanted with Vedic accent by Śrīvidyā adepts at the conclusion of the *śrīcakra* worship.

82. *TUbhāṣya,* v. 15. A translation and study of the *Kaula Upaniṣadbhāṣya* is forthcoming.

83. See Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," pp. 372ff.

84. For a further discussion of this, see ibid., 546ff. A study of the contemporary forms of Śrīvidyā in South India is forthcoming.

85. The *Bhāvana Upaniṣad* with Bhāskararāya's commentary has been translated into English. See *Bhāvanopaniṣad,* rendered into English with notes and annotations by S. Mira (Madras: Ganesh and Co., 1976).

Chapter Two

1. Graham, *Oral Aspects,* p. 6.

2. Ibid.

Graham goes on to say, "The historian does not have to prove or disprove claims of ultimacy or transcendence for a given text, but he or she does have to address seriously its significant mundane importance: the historical fact that men and women of faith have found ultimacy, have encountered transcendence, in its texts. This, after all, is why we call it 'scripture.' " This may be why *we* call a text scripture, but it may not be why those for whom a text is sacred call it scripture.

Are all "scriptures" an encounter with the transcendent? I think they need not be. Graham's initial remark, that scripture is a relational category, is the more accurate and useful distinction. To go further than this and attribute to "scripture" characteristics, such as the idea that *all* scriptures are encounters with the transcendent, is an unnecessary (and perhaps unwarranted) assumption. One might say that inasmuch as texts are treated as scripture or function as scripture, they are understood as "sacred." This is quite different than attributing to the text itself any characteristic or quality: the sacred is itself a relational category, not an attribute.

3. See Coburn, " 'Scripture' in India," pp. 435–59.

4. On the "meaninglessness" of ritual mantras and texts, see Frits Staal, "The Meaninglessness of Ritual," *Numen,* vol. 26, pp. 2–22.

5. *HTSL,* p. 13.

6. These interpretive conditions warrant some further explanation of how the present work has been undertaken. How this study has proceeded and what it conceives the text to *be* are not inconsequential to reading and understanding the *Tripurā Upaniṣad*. At stake also are ethical issues regarding my relationship with informants who have divulged to me their "secret" tradition. Undoubtedly my personal interest in the Śrīvidyā school's traditions have played a major role in the access I have been able to gain to contemporary scholar-initiates. These relationships one should not take lightly, nor the ethical responsibility to keep confidential certain personal matters. Whenever possible I have observed practices and interpretations "in action." I have chosen not to comment on matters discussed in the living traditions that I have not collected myself. Regarding the present study, concerned as it is with creating an interpretive basis for further studies, it has been a matter of obtaining textual interpretations from adepts within Kaula or Kaula-influenced lineages and from other scholars, some of whom are Śrīvidyā adepts and some not.

I have taken the Śrīvidyā adepts I have met seriously, without forsaking critical and philological methods in the study of religion. Personal relationships and scholarly endeavors I do not take to be mutually exclusive.

Every translation is an effort to offer the materials in terms intelligible to the scholar and his audience. As a matter of principle, no term in the Upaniṣad or the commentary is left untranslated unless it is a proper name, serves a specific technical purpose in the text—in which case an explanatory note is provided—or is glossed by the commentator as a synonym.

Every act of translation is also an act of interpretation. I do not assume the meanings of the text advanced by adepts, whether they be in English or an Indian language. Rather, I study them critically in an effort to establish their sense as it might be best expressed in English.

7. Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," p. 13.

8. The two adepts with whom I have worked most closely are Dr. G. Sundaramoorthy, Professor of Sanskrit at Madurai-Kamaraja University, Madurai, and Dr. S. Venkataraghavan, formally of Madras and now residing in Bombay. Dr. Sundaramoorthy and I produced the translation in a line by line study of the text while Dr. Raghavan offered particular comments on certain grammatical and interpretive issues. For the version of the text included here in Part Two I am indebted to Dr. Gary Tubb for his helpful corrections and insights.

9. See Graham, *Oral Aspects,* p. 41.

10. Also considered are the actual uses of the text as a part of the larger interpretive framework of Bhāskararāya's Śrīvidyā in order to understand its

contents as practical forms of spiritual discipline (*sādhana*). This approach is at times our only recourse to any understanding of the text at all.

11. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 43.

Chapter Three

1. Bhāskararāya's commentary on the *Tripurā Upaniṣad* is certainly not his most important or comprehensive work, nor is the Upaniṣad a significant scriptural resource of the Śrīvidyā school in the historical sense. This point is a matter of controversy within the living Śrīvidyā traditions in South India.

One could hardly dispute the contention that a more thorough and comprehensive study of Bhāskararāya's works are necessary to provide a complete view of his theology. Such a study—a future project—would undoubtedly include an in-depth review of Bhāskararāya's three major efforts: his long and detailed commentary on the *Vāmakeśvara Tantra* entitled *Setubandha,* his extensive commentary on the thousand names of the goddess Lalitā, i.e., *Lalitāsahasranāma,* entitled *Saubhāgyabhāskara,* and his short but influential treatise on mantra entitled *Varivasyārahasya.* For details on editions and manuscripts of these works consult the bibliography. The same restricted audience is *not* supposed for his non-Tantric works. Thus, Bhāskararāya maintains the "double norm" in his written persona as well.

2. See *Tirumantiram,* 1282, the first verse of the twelfth chapter entitled *Puvanapati cakkaram,* which is an explicit reference to the *kādimata* version of the *śrīvidyā,* in *Thiru Manthiram of Tirumūlanāyanar,* vol. 1. (in Tamil), ed. Thiru P. Ramanātha Pillai (Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India: The South Indian Śaiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, 1957), 2d rev. ed. There are no page numbers in this book, see v. 1282 as cited above. See Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," pp. 89–92 for details. On Tirumūlar's life and works, see K. V. Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrossowitz, 1974). (*A History of Indian Literature,* vol. 10, fasc. 1, ed. Jan Gonda); also K. V. Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975). (Handbuch der Orientalistik, II-2-I.)

3. When Śrīvidyā sources do emerge in written forms, they present fully mature theologies, ritual prescriptions, and interpretations. It seems improbable, if not utterly impossible, for these sources to arise without oral precedent. Given the dual roles of secrecy (*rahasya*) and oral transmission within Tantrism, oral versions of textual materials very likely set the standards for the emerging literary traditions. The question remains, however, given their views on the nature of the teaching and its transmission, why Tantrics wrote at all. This question will be explored in the Conclusion. See *HTSL* for a review of the historical origins of Tantric and Śākta literature.

4. *HT,* pp. 6–7. He also says here, "The essential role of Śāktism in the Tantric tradition is emphasized by various authors. Tantrism and the Śakti cult are even identified outright. But it seems best to consider, with Payne (*Śāktas,* p. 72), Śāktism and Tantrism as 'two intersecting but not coinciding circles.' On account of its 'inclusive' nature, Tantrism is much more diffused."

5. Cf. *HTSL,* pp. 1ff. The definition developed here draws freely from both Goudriaan (*HT, HTSL*) and Padoux I and II.

6. The term *anubhava,* which literally means “to undergo,” is also used to distinguish the purely intellectual understanding of the tradition from one’s own experiences of ultimate truth.

7. This view also widely held outside Tantric circles, especially within Vedānta schools. See P. N. Śrīnivasachari, *Bhedābheda or the Philosophy between Śaṃkara and Rāmānuja* (Madras 1939); and also, by the same author, *The Philosophy of Bhedābheda* (Adyar, Madras: Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1950); and Daniel H. H. Ingalls, “Bhāskara the Vedāntin,” *Philosophy East and West* 17 (1967): 61–88. For a more complete listing of secondary sources on Bhāskara the Vedāntin and on the Bhedābheda school of Hindu philosophy, see Potter, *Bibliography,* pp. 181–82 and pp. 757–58.

8. Śāṅkara argues that knowledge alone effects liberation, since any type of action, based as it is on a dualistic mode of behavior, can only bring about impermanent results.

9. See Sitarama Shastri *Kaula and Other Upaniṣads* p. 2.

10. Tantrāloka, 4.77. *yataḥ śāstrakramattajjñaguruptajñānusilanāt/ ātmapratyayitam jñānam pūrṇatvād bhairavayat//*See *The Tantrāloka of Abhinavagupta with the Commentary of Jayaratha,* ed. N. R. C. Dwivedi and N. Rastogi, reprint of the original Kashmiri Series of Texts and Studies edition by M. K. Shastri (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987).

11. The debate continues in contemporary Śrīvidyā circles. Most Tantric writers in the sanskritic traditions, while acknowledging the necessity of personal experience and the fact that intellectual learning is neither necessary nor sufficient for liberation, nevertheless obviously support advanced forms of theological education. See Bhāskararāya’s remarks on *YH,* 1.3f.

12. Cf. *The Tantrāloka of Abhinavagupta,* vol. 1, p. 14.

13. In this respect we observe another stark contrast with Śaṅkara’s *keveladvaita.* In contrast to Śaṅkara’s rejection of action of any sort as an efficacious element for obtaining knowledge (*jñāna*), the Tantric admits that action (*karma*) remains an essential part of the path. One can even argue that Tantrics, such as Bhāskararāya, do not maintain knowledge as wholly separate from action, as Śaṅkara would have it, but rather consider knowledge a species of action and vice versa.

For another discussion of *antaryāga* and its ritual prescriptions, see *HT,* pp. 127f.

14. The same can be done for the other religious traditions which are Tantric. The Tantric taxa of each religion may differ, but the method per se does not necessarily eliminate the generic category. We can still come to an understanding of the class of Tantric phenomena by generating a polythetic class of common features drawn from the more specific features evident in each particular case. This more general task I leave aside here. My point is that the method proposed is exacting whether it is used to define Tantrism in one religion or across religions. The result is not that there are only distinctive forms of Tantrism and thus many Tantrism*s*, but that there are more and more exacting taxa which can be employed in a polythetic model which will take us from the particular to the general. It is no different a task than creating a method which permits us to distinguish apples of

different types and also allows us to see that apples can be distinguished within a larger class such as that of fruits. As we move to greater levels of generalization we naturally sacrifice degrees of precision that are part of the task of descriptive classification. We do not, however, necessarily sacrifice precision in methodology.

15. Smith, *Imagining Religion,* pp. 1–8. The citation is on p. 4. In an earlier article, Rodney Needham works out the use of polythetic classification for analyses of kinship. See his "Polythetic Classification: Convergence and Consequences," *Man* 10 (1975): 349–69.

16. In contemporary South India, for example, "tantric" is practically a dirty word in Tamil. Few self-respecting, brahmans (or brāhmaṇically influenced people) would care to be called Tantrics.

Put differently, it is perhaps more appropriate to use "Tantric" as an adjective describing individuals or groups displaying a synthesis of generic characteristics, than to treat it as a noun suggesting a single or fixed set of organizational principles.

17. Not all Śrīvidyā adepts, for example, utilize the *śrīcakra* in their worship.

18. *HT,* pp. 7f.

19. For an excellent discussion of the use and meaning of upside-down language in Kabīr's work, see *The Bījak of Kabīr,* trans. Linda Hess and Shukdev Singh, essays and notes by Linda Hess (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, reprint edition, 1986), Appendix A, pp. 135–61.

20. See *HT,* Chapter 6, for an extensive discussion of the yogic elements of Tantric *sādhana.*

21. The Śrīvidyā school's ritual handbooks (*paddhati*) locate the three "extra" centers as below the physical body (called *akulasahasradhāra*), that is, below the *mūlādhāra cakra,* above the physical body (called *kulasahasradhārā*), that is, above the thousand-petalled lotus, and behind the tongue between the *viśuddhi* and *ājñā cakras.*

22. For a more detailed discussion of *kuṇḍalinī yoga* and the correspondences between macro- and micro-cosmic elements in the system, see *HT,* pp. 57ff.

23. Cf. Bhāskararāya's *Prakāśa* on *VVR,* 1.42–43ab; also, *YH,* 3.176, pp. 312ff. The system elaborated in the *VVR Prakāśa* is extremely complicated due to the different methods of describing and classifying these nine extra centers. Basically they are called *śūnyas, avasthas,* and *viśuvas*. According to *YH* 3.176, the *śūnyas* are six, the *avasthas* are five, and the *viśuvas* are seven. Bhāskararāya tries to reconcile his own views with this system but essentially reinterprets the matter to suit his own understanding. Beginning just above the *sahasradalapadma,* he describes nine centers and the method by which one meditates on their respective forms. The nine are called in ascending order: *bindu, ardhacandra, rodhinī, nādā, nādānta, śakti, vyāpika, samāna, unmanī,* and *mahābindu,* which, like the thousand-petalled center, is not counted.

24. For a more detailed discussion of *kuṇḍalinī* and other forms of yoga, see Eliade *Yoga,* and *HT,* pp. 163–80.

25. Cf. Dyczkowski, *Doctrine of Vibration,* pp. 127–28 and p. 167; also, *HT,* p. 62f.

26. The ten principal *mudrās* important in Śrīvidyā are identified in the worship of the *śrīcakra* with the *yoginīs* placed on the innermost of the three lines of the *bhūgṛha* (i.e., the innermost of the three square lines that surround the *śrīcakra*). The *Dave* edition of the *PKS* includes photographs of the ten *mudrās*. For a description of their function and place in Śrīvidyā worship, see Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," pp. 320–22.

27. See Gonda's "The Indian Mantra," for a more complete discussion of mantra theory and practice. Also Harvey Alper, ed., *Mantra* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988).

28. Cf., *Śrīcakrārcanadīpikā* (*Śrīvidyāsaparyapaddatih*) *with Shadāmnayam* (Madras: Śrī Chidānanda Mandali, 1984), p. 3. The mantra to which I refer is the *gurūpāduka,* which reads: *auṃ aiṃ hrīṃ srīṃ aiṃ klīṃ sauḥ hamsaḥ śivaḥ sohaṃ hskhphreṃ hasaksamalavarayūṃ hrsauḥ sahaksamalavarayīṃ shauḥ hamsaḥ śivaḥ sohaṃ svarūpanirūpanahetave śrīgurave namaḥ amukānandanātha śrīpādukam pūjāyāmi namaḥ.*

29. Cf. S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *The Tantra of the Śrīcakra* (Bangalore: Sharada Prakshana, 1983), p. ii–iii.

30. Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple* (Calcutta, 1946; reprinted in two volumes, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981). See vol. 1, p. 11, of the reprint edition.

31. *Artharatnāvali* on *NSA,* 1.43.

32. A guru, however, need not be physically present for an adept to claim a proper initiation. Initiation also can occur in dreams, visions, or in other extraordinary contexts.

33. Cf. *HT,* p. 54–55. The image is also mentioned by Bhāskararāya. See *TUbhāṣya,* v. 14.

34. Cf. Bhāskararāya's remarks on *VVR,* 69, and Amṛtānanda on *YH,* 1.6 and 2.19 (as cited in *HT,* p. 55).

35. For further discussion, see *HT,* pp. 51–53.

36. For a discussion of the distinction between "worldly pleasure" and "spiritual bliss" see Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration,* pp. 147–48. Dyczkowski cites Abhinavagupta, who writes in *Vijñānabhairava,* v. 74: "Once one has overcome distraction, the pleasure one enjoys through the sentiments of love, etc., expressed in poetry or drama, for example, differs from the pleasure derived from the sense objects. This is because [one gains access to it] by the removal of such obstacles as the anticipation of personal gain" (pp. 147–48).

37. See Sitarama Shastri edition, *Kaula and Other Upaniṣads,* p. 3.

38. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

39. The idea of initiation based on criteria other than caste or gender is not, as it is often thought, strictly a non-Vaidika Tantric notion. One need only recall that the Upaniṣadic sage Yajñavalkya offers his special instruction to his wife, Maitreyī, because she is best qualified to understand it. (See Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, 2.5) This example within the Vaidika tradition offers a clear instance in which the norm is transcended. We should also note that in both Tantric and

Upaniṣadic cases, the criteria for qualification are established for esoteric, "private" knowledge.

40. See *HT,* pp. 71f, and *PKS*.

41. This view contrasts Bharati's opinion, which is not incorrect but overstated. See Agehānanda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition* (New York: Samuel Weiser; revised american reprint edition, 1975), p. 233; originally published London: Rider, 1965.

42. Cf. Padoux, *Parole,* pp. 44f.; and *HT,* pp. 7ff.

43. *HTSL,* p. 8.

44. Cf. *HT,* pp. 56f. As Goudriaan points out, the three goddess's aspects, *aghora, ghora,* and *ghoratara* are usually aligned with other triadic forms, including the consorts of the *trimūrti* (Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva) Vāmā, Jyeṣṭhā, and Raudrī, who are associated with the *śabda* or sound emanation aspects of Brahman. These alignments are paralleled also by the three fundamental powers (*śakti*) Desire (*icchā*), Action (*kriyā*), and Knowledge (*jñāna*). These basic divisions and attributes are expanded into sets of four and five in some sources, and in Śrīvidyā to sets of fifteen and sixteen.

45. *TUbhāṣya,* v. 6.

46. Cf. *HTSL,* pp. 16ff.

47. See Bhāskararāya's discussion of the first verse of the *NSA* in which he identifies the fifty-one Gaṇeśas. *NSA,* pp. 7f. See Courtright (bibliography) for the most extensive discussion of Gaṇeśa to date.

48. Cf. *HT,* pp. 43f.

49. For example, the complicated division in the *Śaktisaṃgama Tantra* proposing the worship of Kālī, Tārā, and Tripurā in the Gauḍa, Kaśmīra, and Kerala traditions is unattested. See *HT,* p. 43.

50. Cf. Pandey, *Abhinavagupta,* Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration,* and Rastogi, *Krama Tantricism,* for a more thorough discussion of the Trika and Krama schools. See also Sanderson's articles in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*.

51. Śākta Tantrics are exemplary of Tantrism in general by their commitment to its synthetic structure, elaboration, and patterns of belief and practice. While all Tantric sects, for example, employ bipolar and sexual symbolism to embody ritually the Upanisadic notions of Ātman and Brahman, only Śāktas take the metaphysical position to the conclusion of absolute nondualism. Śaiva Āgamas and Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra traditions remain committed to varying degrees of theological dualism in which the individual's relationship to the divine is subordinate even at the final level of spiritual realization. Hence, divine grace and supernatural intervention play a more prominent role in defining the liberative process for non-Śākta-oriented Tantrics. Āgamic-oriented Śaivas and Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātrins place less stress than Śāktas on private, individual efforts in meditation and ritual enactment. It can also be argued that only Śāktas systematize their esoteric theology by making ritual enactment the key to liberation. Others, in comparison, reflect this process only partially.

Cf. Goudriaan, who makes a similar statement in *HTSL,* pp. 8f. While this point is worth further reflection, it seems tangential to the thrust of this argument. Śāktas emphasize all three elements of soteriology (i.e., self-effort, divine grace or intervention, and the manipulative, quasi-independent power of mantras and rituals) and yet place a greater stress on the individual's role in affecting the final goal.

52. This statement is based on the experience of my fieldwork. While the vast majority of my efforts were directed towards South Indian forms of practice, my correspondence and contacts touched down in virtually every region. This began as an effort to find South Indian adherents in areas other than the south but quickly led to further contact with adepts neither of South Indian origin nor claiming any direct connection with the south Indian regional tradition.

Śāktas committed to the goddess in beneficent (*saumya*) forms other than Śrīvidyā's Lalitā Tripurasundarī display, in comparison, less developed forms of Tantric spiritual discipline (*sādhana*) especially with regard to the worship of the basic Tantric triad integrating an anthropomorphic image, mantra, and yantra. An example of this is the goddess Tārā, who in Hindu Tantric works has a mantra and yantra but no systematic forms of *pūjā* practiced widely. I am not referring to a relative popularity in regard to the worship of other goddesses but rather a historical pattern in which other beneficent deities have not enjoyed the same degree of attention as Lalitā with regard to these esoteric images and practices. Goudriaan also maintains the same opinion. See *HTSL,* Chapter 1.

Only the worship of the terrifying Kālī aspect set forth in the Kālīkula Tantras (and in its Bengali forms especially) reaches comparable levels of systematization. Even in this case, however, the effort to link theoretical and speculative symbolism with ritual practice appears to have been less clearly developed than in Śrīvidyā sources. See *HTSL,* pp. 75f. and also K. R. Kooj, *Worship of the Goddess According to the Kālīkapurāṇa. Part I: A Translation with an Introduction and Notes of Chapters 54–69* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972).

53. A study of the sect in its living forms has already been undertaken as part of my earlier doctoral research. These materials will soon be made available as a study of the living Śrīvidyā cult in South India. A regional focus on Śrīvidyā's living traditions also provides an opportunity to dispel certain superficial generalizations about Tantrism which have unfortunately evolved into cherished dogmas. Or the notion, not uncommon in contemporary India, that all Tantrics are given to radical forms of behavior. See *HTSL,* p. 3 and notes, for further references.

An emphasis on oral and regional factors gives shape to what are otherwise purely abstract textual formulations. One example is the often repeated notion that caste and gender are not significant factors in determining spiritual qualification (*adhikāra*). These are, in fact, essential features of any Tantric evaluation for discipleship. With the living oral tradition and actual cases in mind it is possible to observe how Śrīvidyā interprets these issues in text, history, and practice.

Regional distinctions made in textual sources do not account for the significant variations in the practices and customs (*deśācāra*) that color traditional lore and determine actual forms of ritual and faith. South Indian Śrīvidyā adepts, for example, differ from their northern counterparts in the ways in which they prepare themselves physically for ritual worship (*pūjā*).

The south Indian setting also affords the opportunity to examine Śrīvidyā tradition as a private Tantric tradition as well as in more public dimensions. For example, Śrīvidyā has acquired a unique place in southern Śaiva temples and in the traditions of the *mathas* of the Śāṅkara tradition in Kāñcipuram and Śṛṅgeri; it is one of the few Tantric sects whose distinctive features are directly observable outside the domains of private, initiated Tantric practice. In the Kāmākṣī temple at Kāñcipuram, for example, the *śrīcakra,* an object of worship specific to Śrīvidyā, is worshiped in public contexts regardless of the initiated status of the devotee. In another case, a major literary work of Śrīvidyā, the *Saundaryalaharī* attributed to Śaṅkarācārya, has gained enormous popularity among southern Śrīvidyā adepts who instruct noninitiates into its specific ritual uses (*prayogas*).

Śrīvidyā is not only important as a historical sect of Śākta Tantrism but in recent times has left a significant mark on the larger fabric of Hindu Indian life. Its basic triad of theological and ritual forms has become part of the mainstreams of Hindu faith; its adepts have brought ordinarily restricted, initiated beliefs and practices into popular religious settings.

54. See *TUbhāṣya,* introduction to v. 1.

55. There is no reason to believe, however, that the text ever existed in any form significantly different than those presently available in print or in manuscript. While it may make more logical sense to reorder certain verses—for example, to place verse 7 with verses 11 and 12 for reasons of continuity of subject and theme—there is no historical justification for doing this.

56. *Śloka* meter, also called *anuṣṭubh,* occurs in several varieties but here it refers to the type which contains eight syllables in a quarter, thus sixteen to a line and thirty-two to a verse. The fifth syllable of each quarter is short, the sixth long, and the seventh either short or long. For a discussion of Sanskrit prosody, see V. S. Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary,* reprinted from the revised and enlarged edition (Poona 1957; Kyoto: Rinsen Book Company, 1978), Appendix A, pp. 1–12. For the discussion of *śloka* meter, see p. 3.

57. On the symbolism of 16 see Jan Gonda, *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965).

58. The issue most frequently raised among contemporary Śrīvidyā adepts in South India is why Bhāskararāya choose *Tripurā Upaniṣad* over the *Tripurātāpinī Upaniṣad,* especially since the latter contains similar material in greater detail. Since he mentions *Tripurātāpinī* in his *Tripurā* commentary, the situation is especially puzzling.

59. *TUbhāṣya,* v. 16.

60. *TUbhāṣya,* introduction to v. 1.

61. For a discussion of Śakti *pīṭhas* or pilgrimage sites in which the goddess in a particular name and form is manifested, see D. C. Sircar, *The Śākta Pīṭhas,* 2d ed. (Calcutta: University Press, 1973; reprint edition, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981).

62. The verse would seem more appropriately placed after verse 12, which lists the five "prohibited substances" or *makāras* as those that are suitable ritual offerings.

63. For a thorough discussion of the relationship between the erotic and the ascetic in the mythology of Śiva, see Wendy D. O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism.*

64. Bhāskararāya on *VVR,* 1.7, and in his *Setubandha* identifies *Ṛg Veda,* 5.47.4 (*catvāra īṃ bibhrati kṣemayantaḥ*), as an esoteric revelation of the *śrīvidyā.* The verse which literally means "the four [priests], desiring benefit for themselves, worship [this god]," is interpreted by Bhāskararāya as saying "that which contains the four īṃs [i.e., the four long *ī* vowels contained in the *kādi* form of the fifteen-syllable *śrīvidyā* mantra] confers benefit." This reference also seems to assert indirectly the originality of the *kādi* form of the *pañcadaśākṣarī* since no other fifteen-syllable configuration (including the *hādi* version) contains four long *ī* vowels. See also Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," p. 224, and K. R. Venkataraman's remarks in "Śakti Cult in South India" in *The Cultural History of India,* vol. 4, edited by the Ramakrishna Institute (Ramakrishna Mission: Calcutta, reprint edition 1983, pp. 252–59).

65. For further information on Rāmeśvara Sūri, see *PKS,* introduction; Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," p. 156f.; and *HTSL,* pp. 151f.

66. Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," p. 250.

67. See Rāmeśvara's remarks on *PKS,* 1.20, p. 35, as cited above.

68. *TUbhāṣya,* v. 7.

69. Rāmeśvara makes this point perfectly clear. See his remarks on *PKS,* 1.20ff.

70. *TUbhāṣya,* v. 8.

71. Ibid., introduction to v. 1.

72. Ibid., v. 8.

73. Ibid., v. 1.

74. Ibid., v. 13.

75. Ibid., v. 1.

76. The discussion of the qualities of the guru is taken up in *PKS*; see the *dīkṣāvidhi* section and Rāmeśvara Sūri's remarks.

77. Rāmeśvara, rather interestingly, does not go along with this. He says clearly that a disciple should not obey a guru's commands that violate Dharma. See Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," p. 250 and n. 100.

78. Cf. *TUbhāṣya,* v. 1, and the introduction to *VVR.*

79. *TUbhāṣya,* v. 1. He cites here *Bhagavadgītā,* 3.20 and 3.26.

80. *TUbhāṣya,* v. 15.

81. Ibid., v. 13.

82. Ibid., v. 14.

83. Ibid., v. 1.

84. This point is similarly made by the Bhedābhedavādins such as Bhāskara the Vedāntin. See Ingalls, "Brahman Tradition"; also Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration,* pp. 24–25, p. 37–46, and p. 232 n. 96; and *HT,* p. 49.

85. Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration,* p. 41, appropriately cites Abhinavagupta, who writes, "if daily life which is useful for everybody, everywhere and at all times were not real then we know of nothing else which is real." See p. 235 n. 45; Abhinava's remarks, Dyczkowski notes, are from his *Iśvara Pratyabhijña,* v. 2, p. 59.

86. Cf. Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration,* p. 41.

87. The position of Śaṅkara in Śrīvidyā tradition is clear to adepts but not grounded in history. As far as the majority of historical writers and contemporary

adepts are concerned, Śaṅkara was a Śrīvidyā adept best known for his lovely *Saundaryalaharī* and a commentary on the *Three Hundred Names of Lalitā* (*Lalitātriśatī*). It is doubtful, if not impossible, that the Śaṅkara who authored the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* and other works of *advaitavedānta* is also the author of these Śākta Tantric works. It is more likely that a later follower of Śaṅkara from one of the established schools (*maṭha*) composed these works and attributed them to his spiritual master. For a more complete discussion of Śaṅkara's role in Śrīvidyā, see Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," pp. 130ff; on Śaṅkara's works, see Hacker.

88. *VVR,* p. 4–5. *'tasyām parinatāyām tu na kaścit parā iṣyate' iti vāmakeśvaratantrāt, vācārambhanaṃ vikāraḥ' ityādiśrutīnām tatraiva svārasyāccal śaktiśaktimatorūpādānopadeyayoratyantamabhedaḥ, na puraupaniṣadādivadbhedābhedau/ ata eva sarvam khalvidam brahma' iti sāmānādhikāranyamābhede, na punarbādhayām//*

89. Tantrism, however, has too often been viewed as centered solely on erotic symbolism and practice. This bias overlooks not only the vast array of concepts, symbols, and practices that are not explicitly erotic, but fails to consider seriously the role of eroticism in different sectarian Tantric traditions. While bipolar symbolism involving sexual imagery pervades Tantric traditions, it is not necessarily interpreted to be erotic in every case. Within the Śrīvidyā school, for example, the erotic relationship between the beneficent goddess Lalitātripurasundarī and her consort Śiva is clearly of secondary concern to adepts intellectually preoccupied with the Godhead's initial cosmogonic transformation from unity to bipolar complements. Further, Śrīvidyā's puritanical biases deemphasize the erotic in favor of a more conservative standard of social morality.

90. *VVR,* p. 5. *sarvapramāṇamūrdhanyāyā śrutyā tadanusāritantraiścādvaite kathite, tadviruddhatvena bhāsamānaḥ kāryakāranayorbhedāṃśa eva kalpita āstam na punaḥ sarvo'pi prapañcaḥ/*

91. *TUbhāṣya,* v. 9.

92. Ibid., v. 15.

93. Naṭarāja of the Guru Mandali, Madurai, 1984. See Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School."

94. *TUbhāṣya,* v. 15.

95. Cf. Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration,* pp. 147–48.

96. In the Śrīvidyā school, for example, the ten *siddhis,* beginning with the power to make oneself minute (*aṇima*), are considered the first level of spiritual accomplishment and are therefore placed at the outermost points on the *śrīcakra.* As the adept ritually moves closer to the center of the *śrīcakra,* there is a gradual ascent to more spiritual aims and less emphasis on material or worldly forms of accomplishment.

97. Cf. *PKS* 1, and *HT,* pp. 77f.

98. Cf. *HT,* pp. 25f.

99. On the question of conflict or complements of Dharma and *mokṣa,* see D. H. H. Ingalls, and J. A. B. van Buitenen, "*Dharma* and *mokṣa,*" *Philosophy East and West* 7 (1957): 1–10.

100. While many contemporary and historical proponents, including Bhāskararāya, cite Śaṅkara as an authority within Śrīvidyā and implicitly condone

his ascetical life-style, they also clearly reject (though they rarely point this out) many of his views. The ambiguity of the situation leaves the interpreter without absolute certainty regarding Tantrics' positions. While it is often unclear if Tantrics condone the ascetical life-style, it is certain that they do not, by and large, consider it in any way necessary for Tantric *sādhana*.

101. Cf. Malcolm David Eckel, *Jñānagarbha's Commentary on the Distinction between the Two Truths* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), p. 71.

102. *TUbhāṣya*, v. 1.

103. Ibid., v. 14.

104. Cf. Dyczkowski, pp. 43–45.

105. *TUbhāṣya*, v. 9; see also n. 149 of the translation.

106. Ibid.; also n. 150 of the translation.

107. Ibid., v. 14.

108. See *Saubhāgyabhāskara* on the *Lalitāsahasranāma*, commentary on name no. 84, Sastry, p. 84.

109. *TUbhāṣya*, v. 2.

110. Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," p. 193.

111. *TU*, v. 13. *śṛṇyeva sitayā viśvacarṣaṇiḥ pāśena pratibandhnātyabhīkān/ iṣubhiḥ pañcabhirdhanuṣā ca vidhyatyādiśaktiraruṇā viśvajanyā//*

112. Cf. *Mantravidānam* (in Sanskrit and Tamil), ed. "Annā" (Madras: Ramakrishna Mission, 1981), p. 31. *arunāṃ karuṇātaraṅgitākṣīm dhṛtapāśāṅkuśapuṣpabānacāpām/ aṇimādibhirāvṛtām mayūkhairahamityeva vibhāvaye bhavānim//*

113. *TUbhāṣya*, v. 13.

114. Ibid., v. 6.

115. Especially when contrasted with the more ideological and sectarian forms of Vaiṣṇavism in which the image of Viṣṇu not only encompasses all others but effectively eliminates them.

116. Ibid., v. 10.

117. Ibid., v. 1.

118. Cf. Sastry's translation of Bhāskararāya's commentary on the *Lalitāsahasranāma*. Because this text clearly has a devotional use as well as being a source of theological speculation and practice, he makes a point of introducing the devotional elements into his commentary.

119. See the translation of *TUbhāṣya*; Bhāskararāya calls Śiva "Mādana" in remarks on verse 6, "Kāmeśvara" on verse 14, "Śaṃbhu" on verse 1.

120. Ibid., v. 14.

121. Ibid.

122. Śrīvidyā adepts in South India, for example, have *sādhanas* designed for a number of Skanda mantras. Often the figure involved is Subrahmaṇya, who is sometimes worshiped by his familiar Tamil name, Murugan.

123. Cf. Charlotte Vaudeville, *Kabīr*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); also *The Sant Tradition in India*, ed. Karine Schomer and W. H. McLeod (Berkeley: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1983); *Speaking of Śiva*, trans. A. K. Ramanujan (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1973); also Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*.

124. *TUbhāṣya*, v. 1.

125. Ibid., v. 7.

126. Elsewhere in the commentary he reiterates the idea that worldly and soteriological goals should be coextensive and that worldly empowerments are adventitious by-products that follow from more lofty spiritual aspirations.

127. This is the primary subject of his discussion in the second chapter of the *Setubandha* on *Vāmakeśvaratantra.*

128. Cf. *Saundaryalaharī,* v. 19cdefgh without the first word of cd, *harārdham,* in *Saundaryalaharī of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya with the commentary of Lakṣmīdhara, Bhāvanopaniṣat with the commentary of Bhāskararāya and Devī Pañcastavi,* critically edited by Vidvan N. S. Venkatanāthacharya (Mysore: Oriental Research Institute, 4th rev. ed., 1969), p. 58. *mukham bindum kṛtvā kucayugamadhastasya tadadho, (harārdham) dhyāyedyo haramahisi te manmathakalām//*

129. *HTSL,* p. 58.

130. Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," p. 269; *YH,* 1.9cd–10ab. *yadā sā paramā śaktiḥ svechayā viśvarūpinī/ sphurattāmātmanaḥ paśyettadā cakrasya sambhavaḥ//*

131. In contrast to the so-called Samaya version of the *śrīcakra* in which the figure is inverted such that the five major triangles face up and the *bindu* is placed in the space above the innermost triangle.

132. A verse often quoted by Śrīvidyā adepts states: "By the four *cakras* of Śiva and by the five *cakras* of Śakti, the *śrīcakra* is established by nine *cakras* which are the body of Śiva and Śakti." *caturbhiḥ śivacakraiś ca śakticakraiśca pañcabhiḥ/ navacakraiś ca saṃsiddham śrīcakram śivayor vapuḥ//* Cf. *Luptāgamasaṃgraha,* ed. Badrinatha Sukla and Gopinath Kaviraja (Varanasi, 1970), p. 40.

133. In this case the Śakti *cakras* consist of the outer fourteen triangles, the two sets of ten triangles, the eight triangles, and the innermost triangle or *trikoṇa.* The Śiva *cakras* consist of the outer gateways, the two sets of lotus petals, and the *bindu* or drop at the center of the *śrīcakra.* The most elaborate discussion of the *śrīcakra* and its specific symbolism and modes of worship is Madhu Khanna, "The Concept and Liturgy of the Śrīcakra Based on Śivānanda's Trilogy" Ph.D. dissertation, Wolfson College, Oxford University, 1986.

134. Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," pp. 311f. The oral tradition discusses the difference in terms of three traditions or *saṃpradāyas* within Śrīvidyā. According to the so-called Daksināmūrti *saṃpradāya,* the three circles are completely absent from the figure; in the Ānandabhairava *saṃpradāya* the three circles are included but no *pūjā* is performed to them (this being the dominant view); while in the Hayagrīva *saṃpradāya* there are both deities (*yoginīs,* in this case) and a prescribed ritual. Cf., *Śrīvidyāratnākāraḥ with shrisaparyamantra-bhāsyawanchhankalpatalaksharchana and allied subjects,* by Swami-Shirhariharānandasaraswati (Shrikarapatraswami) Mahāraj, ed. Shrisitaramakaviraj "Śrīvidyābhāskar" (Dattareyānandanātaḥ) (Calcutta: Bhaktisudha Sahitya Parishad, c. 1958 [?]), p. 338. (This text is not to be confused with the *Saubhāgyaratnākara* of Vidyānanda.)

135. This is a common feature of all Śrīvidyā *paddhatis,* cf., *Śrīcakrārcanadīpikā* cited above or Annā's Śrīvidyā *paddhati* mentioned in the bibliography.

136. *TUbhāṣya,* v. 1.

137. Ibid.

138. It is worth observing here that the human body is called in the Śrīvidyā ritual handbooks the "house of nine gates" (*navagṛhya*) because it has nine "openings."

139. For a brief list of sources on yoga traditions, see the Bibliography.

140. *TUbhāṣya,* v. 2.

141. Ibid.

142. Sitarama Shastri, *Kaula and Other Upaniṣads,* p. 15. *ekā sā āsītprathamā sā navasīdadonaviṃsadāsonatrimsaṭ/ catvāriṃsadatha tisraḥ samidhā uśatīriva mātaro mā viśantu//*

143. *TU*bhāṣya, v. 2.

144. Ibid., v. 15. Bhāskararāya quotes *Kulārṇava Tantra,* 5.80, here.

145. It is important to keep in mind, however, that Bhāskararāya does not interpret the right/left distinction as other Tantrics do.

146. *TUbhāṣya,* v. 12, "Therefore if the primary substance of the *makāra* is not available a substitute (*pratinidhi*) may be used according to the maxim, 'In the event that [all] the five *makāras* are not available the daily worship should be performed.' Even though this is established in the [*Paraśurāma*] *Kalpasūtra,* what has been suggested is that when the preceding element is unavailable the succeeding ones, even if they are primary [and not substitutions], should not be used."

147. Ibid., v. 15.

148. Ibid.

149. Cf. *PKS,* 10.10, p. 257.

150. See his commentary on *PKS,* 2.2.

151. "Naṭarāja," recorded in Madurai, 1984.

152. See *HT,* pp. 145ff., for a further discussion.

153. See *TUbhāṣya,* v. 11, especially where he says, "the fruit of the meditation prescribed having a particular result is achieved even apart from (*bahir*) the external sacrifice (*bahiryāga*); [this is the case because the result] is not connected as an [inseparable] part of the external sacrifice . . . so . . . it does not depend upon the form of any other ritual (*kriyā*)." Once again he compares Tantric ritual, in this case the practice of *kāmakalā* meditation, with Vedic ritual and proscriptions.

154. Ibid., v. 1.

155. Bhāskararāya gives an elaborate exposition demonstrating how one arrives at the forty-eight letters of Sanskrit. See especially n. 41 of the translation.

156. Ibid., v. 2.

157. See ibid., vs. 8–9.

158. See ibid., v. 8t; for Bhāskararāya's detailed exposition of the *śrīvidyā,* see the *Varivasyārahasya* and Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," 1987.

159. Mentioned only briefly in *TUbhāṣya* in remarks on verse 8. Bhāskararāya takes up the subject in more detail elsewhere; cf. his remarks in the *Saubhāgyabhāskara* and *Varivasyārahasya.*

160. On the twelve forms of the *śrīvidyā,* see the translation of the *Tripurātāpinī Upaniṣad* in *Śākta Upaniṣads.*

161. While some historical Śrīvidyā adepts—including the well-known Puṇyānanda, author of the *Kāmakalāvilāsa,* and his disciple Amṛtānanda—maintain the *hādi* ("beginning with *ha*") *upāsana,* there is no textual evidence to support the idea that the Lopāmudrā mantra tradition has developed a corresponding ritual tradition involving the *śrīcakra.*

162. *TUbhāṣya,* v. 8. He says, "Of these two [*vidyās*] because the *kādividyā*'s priority (*ādhikya*) is suggested it has been described first [in the Upaniṣad]." He

says this view is supported by the *Brahmapurāṇa,* which he quotes as saying, "Just as the *Kādi* [tradition (*mata*) texts] are supreme [among the Tantric texts] so the *śrīvidyā* is supreme and likewise the *kādi* [mantra] is supreme."

163. *TUbhāṣya,* v. 16. The *kādi śrīvidyā* mantra is technically encoded in verse 8. The correspondence of the terms given in the verse is as follows:

First *Kūṭa* (*vāgbhavakūṭa*)
desire (*kāma*) = *ka*
womb (*yoni*) = *e*
lotus (*kāmala*) = *ī*
wielder of the thunderbolt (*vajrapaṇi*) = *la*
cave (*guhā*) = *hrīṃ*

Second *Kūṭa* (*kāmarajakūṭa*)
ha = *ha*
sa = sa
wind (*mātriśva*) = *ka*
cloud (*abhra*) = *ha*
Indra = *la*
cave = *hrīṃ*

Third *Kūṭa* (*śaktikūṭa*)
sa = *sa*
ka = ka
la = la
Māyā = *hrīṃ*

Thus, the *kādi śrīvidyā* in the fifteen-syllable (*pañcadaśākṣarī*) form is:

ka e ī la hrīṃ
ha sa ka ha la hrīṃ
sa ka la hrīṃ

The Lopāmudrā or *hādi* version of the mantra is described in verse 9 only by making substitutions in the *kādi* mantra—further suggesting that the Kāmarāja *kādi śrīvidyā* is perhaps the older and more established version of the mantra. The substitution that is offered by the Upaniṣad, according to Bhāskararāya, puts the sixth, seventh, and eighth syllables of the *kādi śrīvidyā, ha, sa,* and *ka,* in place of the first three syllables, *ka, e,* and *i.* The *hādi* version then is:

ha sa ka la hrīṃ
ha sa ka ha la hrīṃ
sa ka la hrīṃ

164. This system Khanna has outlined in exquisite detail. See Khanna, "*The Concept of the Śrīcakra.*"

165. Cf. Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," pp. 236–46.

166. The so-called *laghuṣoḍaśī,* which often precedes initiation into the *mahāṣoḍaśī* among contemporary adepts, is formed by adding the *bīja* syllable *śrīṃ* to the fifteen-syllable *kādi śrīvidyā.* Thus *laghuṣoḍaśī* is:

(1) *ka e ī la hrīṃ*
(2) *ha sa ka ha la hrīṃ*
(3) *sa ka la hrīṃ*
(4) *śrīṃ*

The *mahāsodaśī,* however, is not sixteen syllables at all but rather two sets of *bījas* added at the beginning and the end of the *kādi śrīvidyā. Mahāṣoḍaśī,* instead of having three *kūṭas,* is structured into six units:

(1) *auṃ śrīṃ hrīṃ klīṃ aiṃ sauḥ*
(2) *auṃ hrīṃ śrīṃ*
(3) *ka e ī la hrīṃ*
(4) *ha sa ka ha la hrīṃ*
(5) *sa ka la hrīṃ*
(6) *sauḥ aiṃ klīṃ hrīṃ śrīṃ*

For a detailed discussion of the variations and interpretations of these mantras, see Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," pp. 201–58.

167. With respect to the *śrīcakra* there was little debate until Lakṣmīdhara introduced his own version, the so-called Samayācāra *śrīcakra.* Not only does Lakṣmīdhara's version of the *śrīcakra* present ritual complications he does not explain, it never seems to have developed ritual formulations even among those claiming to be Samayācārins. Thus, Lakṣmīdhara's theoretical distinction presumably was developed in order to distance his tradition further from the Kaula worship he so clearly rejected. Except for this one historical aberration, it appears safe to conclude that there has never been any reason for Śrīvidyā adepts to believe the *śrīcakra* has, or even could, take a variant form. As the cosmological blueprint of reality and the very form which Brahman has assumed, the yantra, in minds of most historical and contemporary adepts, is in some sense "fixed." The more malleable mantra, however, can, at least theoretically, be made to conform to the *śrīcakra.*

168. A member of the "Gāyatrī" Mandali, Madras, 1984.

169. Bhāskararāya clearly has in mind here the prescriptions of the *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra* and, more specifically, the liturgy of a ritual handbook (*nibandha* or *paddhati*), such as the *Nityotsava* of his disciple Umānanda. These latter ritual sources outline explicitly the *nyāsa* by which the adept identifies the three elements of the human personality (physical, verbal, and mental) with the anthropomorphic goddess, *śrīvidyā,* and *śrīcakra.*

170. *TUbhāṣya,* v. 9.

171. Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," pp. 351f.

172. Ibid., pp. 506–31.

173. See Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration,* p. 43.

174. *TUbhāṣya,* v. 15.

Chapter Four

1. I am indebted to William Scott Green for this particular way of putting the problem. For a pointed discussion of the direction the study of religion must take

to achieve these goals, see his "Something Strange, Yet Nothing New: Religion in the Secular Curriculum," *Liberal Education* 73, no. 5 (1987).

2. *Take Judaism, for Example: Studies toward the Comparison of Religions,* ed. Jacob Neusner. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.] See the Preface, p. ix.

3. Ibid., p. x.

4. Ibid., see Neusner's citation of J. Z. Smith on the contemporary program in the study of religion.

5. Ibid., p. 7. Again, I am indebted to Professor Neusner for making the case so lucidly. Rather than attempt to improve on his theoretical stance, I propose to advance the data base.

6. Cf. Green, William Scott, "Storytelling and Holy Man, The Case of Ancient Judaism," in: Neusner, *Take Judaism, for Example* pp. 29–42.

7. The paradigm extends beyond the confines of strictly religious literature. For example, an enduring virtue of the Sanskrit poet Kālidāsa constantly reiterated by contemporary Indians is how little is actually known about him. What is important are his *works* and the fact that he has managed to create a distinctive style within the parameters of traditional literary expectations.

8. See William Scott Green, "Storytelling."

9. Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 54.

10. See ibid., p. 54f.

Part Two, Introduction

1. This edition differs substantially from the version of a commentary attributed to Rāmānanda I obtained from the Adyar Library.

2. Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

3. Dr. S. Venkataraghavan, Madras, 1985. See Brooks, "Śrīvidyā School," pp. 372f.

The Great Upaniṣad of Tripurā

1. Bhāskararāya offers the image of the student prostrating before his teacher, touching his head to the teacher's feet in obeisance. The "thousand-petalled lotus" is the *sahasrāra padma* (*cakra*) described in yogic theory as the source of realization that lies at the pericap of the skull. The author puns on the concept that one can watch an ordinary lotus sprout from another, but here he says the lotus-like center of realization blossoms by having performed service at the lotus-like feet of the teacher. It is also clear that he alludes to the most famous, though legendary, instance of *Samasyāpurāṇa*. The line is a close variant of the one said to have been given by King Kumāradāsa as a challenge to the poet who could best complete the verse. The poet deemed most adept would receive a huge reward. The story surrounds the legend of the great poet Kālidāsa as it is recorded in a number of Jain *prabandhas*.

2. The meaning of the verse here is clear enough. The other major commentators on the text, Upaniṣadbrahmayogin and Rāmānanda, both agree that the Upaniṣad belongs to the *Ṛg* Vedic schools yet at several points

Bhāskararāya mentions that it also is followed by Ātharvavedins. It is, of course, possible that the text was learned in both *Ṛg* Vedic and *Atharva* Vedic schools and that Bhāskararāya, because he is a Ṛgvedin, prefers this recension and, perhaps, a specific, traditional line interpretation.

What is meant by the "*Sāṅkhyāyanakalpasūtra*" is unclear since there is no known text by this name. Does he mean both the *śrauta* and *gṛhya sūtras* bearing the same name? While impossible to verify, this seems likely.

According to Winternitz, the only recension of the *Ṛg Veda* surviving belongs to the *Śākala* school with which Bhāskararāya identifies. See Maurice Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature,* vol. 1, trans. Mrs. S. Ketkar (Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint, 2d ed., 1972), p. 57 n. 1. Winternitz also says concerning the Āraṇyaka (p. 235), "The Kauṣītaka-Brāhmaṇa, which also belongs to the Ṛg-Veda, ends with the Kauṣītaki-Āraṇyaka, of which the Kauṣitaki-Upaniṣad (also called the Kausītaki-Brāhmaṇa-Upaniṣad) forms only a part." Our text, however, does not appear in the *Āraṇyaka* as printed. For translation of the *Sāṅkhyāyana Āraṇyaka,* see idem, p. 235 n. 1. Concerning the *Kauṣītaka Brāhmaṇa,* see *Ṛgveda Brāhmaṇas: the Aitareya and Kausītaka Brāhmaṇas of the Ṛgveda,* trans. A. B. Keith (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1st ed., 1920; reprint Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971).

3. *Traivarṇikaiḥ,* that is, "by those belonging to the three estates." This follows the standard Hindu tenet that only members of the three twice-born castes, namely, Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, and Vaiṣyas, are entitled to Vedic study. Bhāskararāya does not say here explicitly that this Upaniṣad *necessarily* is so restricted study and, in fact, raises the issue of qualification for study (*adhikāra*) later in the same paragraph.

The division of the Vedic sources into *pūrva,* literally "earlier" and *uttara,* "later," sections (*khaṇḍas*) refers to the distinction between ritual and speculative subjects respectively.

4. Bhāskararāya has in mind those who would separate action (*karma*) and knowledge (*jñāna*), as described in the respective *pūrva* and *uttara* sections of the Vedas, as being mutually opposed. He suggests that even the knowledge-oriented sections, the *uttara khaṇḍa,* teach some form of action. This goes against the views of the strict *kevalādvaitins,* such as Śaṅkara, who treat action and knowledge as utterly separate.

"Directly" means that the text itself enjoins the action while "indirectly" indicates that the injunction comes from some other source, be it textual or otherwise.

5. Emend to read *rāmakṛṣṇopāstyadayo'gnyupāstyāadayaśś ca,* following GOML.

6. Bhāskararāya is traditionally attributed authorship of the *Brahmasūtras*, one of three centerpieces of Vedānta teaching, the others being the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavadgītā*.

7. Jaimini, traditionally attributed authorship of the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtras*, is at the forefront of the Ritualist schools (*mīmāṃsā*). *Mīmāṃsā* maintains the primacy and efficacy of ritual actions as the means of fulfilling Vedic injunctions, thus leading to liberation. These ritualist views are contrasted here with those advocating knowledge as liberative. Bhāskararāya's view, not unlike that of Śaṅkara on this particular point, is that ritual is a necessary prerequisite to the "higher path" of

knowledge. He differs from Śaṅkara most evidently on three major points: He maintains that (1) knowledge is a species of action albeit a very different kind than ordinary ritual action, and hence (2) that knowledge and action are not mutually contradictory, and (3) that ritual action (or action in general) should not be given up once the goal of knowledge is achieved.

Regarding the "five forms" of deities, see below.

8. The remark should be understood to mean that had such persons not thought they would gain by doing rituals in the first place and then abandoning their worship of Śiva, they would not now be criticized for having abandoned the principles of *Mīmāṃsā*. Bhāskararāya does not imply that *Mṛgendra Saṃhitā,* a Śaiva Āgama, criticizes Śaiva ritual. See *Mṛgendra Saṃhitā,* chapter 1, verses 2–6, with the commentary in *Śrī Mṛgendrakāmikopāgamaṃ with the vṛtti by Śrī Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇakaṇṭha,* ed. K. and N. Kṛṣṇaśāstri (Devakottai, India: Devakottai Śivāgamasiddhānta-paripālanasaṅgha, 1928). Also verses 2–20 with commentary in *The Mṛgendra Tantram with the commentary of Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha,* ed. with a preface by Pt. Madhusudan Kaul Sastri (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagara Press, 1930) (no. 50 of the Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies).

Emend *śivaśaktipūjāyam* to *śivapūjāyām.*

9. Precisely what is meant by the phrase *vigṛhādipañcakanirāsena* is not clear. Bhāskararāya never specifies the *five* designated forms of the deities that begin with the *vigraha* or anthropomorphic aspect. Many Hindu deities in various aspects share the triad configuration of Tripurasundarī, that is, they have in addition to an anthropomorphic form at least one mantra and yantra form. It is possible that Bhāskararāya has in mind the three forms or levels of mantra he mentions in his commentary on *Lalitāsahasranāma.* This would provide two additional forms and thus complete the fivefold configuration. Curiously, this topic is not raised elsewhere and it should be reiterated that it is not clear what Bhāskararāya has in mind. Living adepts offer no insight into meaning of this rather cryptic remark.

10. *Bhagavadgītā,* 3.20.

11. *Bhagavadgītā,* 3.26. Śaṅkara in his commentary on this verse also encourages the wise to support the continuance of actions by ignorant people. Wise persons, however, should themselves no longer be party to ritual actions. Bhāskararāya differs on this detail, as the text makes clear, and further disassociates himself from Śaṅkara's *kevalādvaita* philosophy.

12. Bhāskararāya not only affirms the basic Śākta Tantric position supporting the possibility of liberation while yet living in the world, i.e., the doctrine of *jīvanmukti,* but clarifies how such adepts should respond to others still bound to the material world. He offers both an insight into how one achieves the goal and a practical method of response for those still on the path and for those who have realized their goal. He again differs significantly from Śaṅkara on the interpretation of a crucial doctrine, this time in three ways. First, he affirms that *jīvanmukta*s should continue to abide by the injunctions and prohibitions of the scriptures; second, he maintains that they should continue to perform rituals for the sake of others; and third, he reiterates the view of the *Bhagavadgītā* that they should continue to act for the sake of making an appropriate appearance to those who might otherwise misinterpret their example.

13. Cf. Bhāskararāya's remarks on *Vāmakeśvaratantra* (*Nityāṣoḍaśīkārṇava*) 1.1. and his commentary leading up to the first verse. Here he discusses the various levels (*bhūmikās*) the devotee must ascend before beginning the worship of Tripurā, the form he considers the highest level of worship. See the *Nityāṣoḍaśīkārṇava* (*Vāmakeśvaratantra*), *with the commentary of Bhāskararāya* (in Sanskrit), ed. Kasinatha Vasudeva Abhyankar (Poona: Ānandāśrama, 3d ed., 1976), pp. 1–9.

14. Bhāskararāya holds that realization of Brahman occurs only through *upāsana* on the deities and that this realization is a form of knowledge, not merely an action. Knowledge, then, is different than mere action; it is also clear, however, that certain kinds of action follow from knowledge.

15. Emend *prādhānyena devatām* to *prahānadevatām.*

16. The translation of Verse 1, like all others, follows Bhāskararāya's interpretation; following Upaniṣadbrahmayogin, the translation would be quite different. For comparison:

> By Her empirical view there are three cities, three paths and [over the *śrīcakra*] in which the syllables '*a*', '*ka*' and '*tha*' are inscribed, She presides.
> She is deathless, ancient, great and the principle cause of the greatness of the gods.

Following Rāmānanda still another interpretation would require another translation of the verse:

> There are three cities, three paths; She is capable of moving in the wheel of the Universe in which there are fifty-one letters inscribed in the form of '*a*', '*ka*' and '*tha*' and [She] presides over these.
> She is without decay, without birth, great and the cause of the greatness of the gods.

17. Discussion of the five types of liberation occurs in more detail in Bhāskararāya's commentary on the *Lalitāsahasranāma,* no. 625. See also the *Setubandha* on *Yoginīhṛdaya* 2.2f. *Kaivalya* is itself a name of the Goddess Lalitā in *Lalitāsahasranāma* no. 625; see Sastry's translation, pp. 252–53.

18. Emend *tāsv ādyantye* to *tāsv ādyantau.*

19. Bhāskararāya quotes the same passage on *Lalitāsaharanāma* no. 625. Its location has not been ascertained in recensions either of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* or of the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa.*

The discussion here centers on the issue of the soul's passage through various karmic cycles depending on the level of spiritual realization it has reached in earthly life. Thus Bhāskararāya describes the various alternatives by referring specifically to older Upaniṣadic cosmologies. In general terms, it is considered more auspicious to die during that portion of the year when the sun is in the northern hemisphere. Here, however, the aim is to describe through Śākta Tantric soteriological categories a distinctive interpretation of the soul's journey. The actual "places" or planes of existence the soul passes through are quite familiar in terms of traditional cosmology, but according to Bhāskararāya the soul's passage is determined according to the three levels of realization attained in the present human birth. This is but another occasion of an esoteric Tantric interpretation of what is essentially an established Vaidika tradition. It is in no way suggested here that Bhāskararāya intends to abandon earlier concepts regarding the various courses the soul might take. Rather, here as in other cases, he expands the traditional Vaidika understandings and places the esoteric Tantric views *within* an established "orthodox" framework.

20. Bhāskararāya attributes these quotations to the third chapter of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* in all available manuscripts. The passages are, however, from the second chapter. See the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, 2.8.85 and 2.8.103.

21. What Bhāskararāya means is not entirely clear. However, he seems to place a strong emphasis on the soul's passage when it passes into states or conditions other than the identification with Brahman. This is only logical since Tantrics chart the soul's course with the explicit intention of eventually leading it to Brahman *kaivalya;* therefore, the soul's "intermediate" conditions are important factors for determining its eventual fate.

The Agastya asterism is identified with Canopes. Vaiśvānara means the path the moon takes across the sky from horizon to horizon.

22. The alternatives suggest the goddess is in three modes depending on the stage of realization achieved by the adept. The point is rather straightforward: no matter what level of realization one obtains or what "world" or existence is reached, whatever that may be is simply another form of the goddess. But because there are these three specific alternatives, She is called Tripurā. On the name of the goddess Tripurā, see *Lalitāsaharanāma* no. 626 with Bhāskararāya's remarks.

The whole sentence should be emended following GOML and Adyar to read: *īdṛśapuratrayavyāpakatvāt pūrakatvāt tadrūpakatvāt vā paradevatā tripurety ucyate.*

23. The source of this quotation has not been identified.

24. Emend *traipuraprāpteruktatvāt* to *devīprapter uktatvāt* following both GOML and Adyar.

25. Emend *tripurā* to add *śaiva tripathā* following Adyar.

The use of the three quotations beginning with the verses of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* adds little to the crux of Bhāskararāya's argument and contributes to the ambiguity of the explanation. Given his usual care, one might suspect this whole passage to be an interpolation, though no manuscripts support this opinion. Had Bhāskararāya skipped all three citations and added only "*ayam . . . tu kaivalyānupabrahmapadapratīriti*" many of the doubts concerning the significance of scriptural references would be alleviated.

26. Kātyāyana's *vārttika* occurs under Pāṇini 2.4.17 and supports the interpretation of the compound as an exocentric or *bahuvrīhi* compound in which the subject stands outside of the compound itself. The idea is simple enough: when the word *pathā* is joined with a numeral it can take a different set of gender endings in order to agree with the subject.

27. If Bhāskararāya has in mind the Vedic grammarian Yāska, there is no statement to this effect in his works. This does not preclude a reference to an oral interpretation.

28. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 6.2.3.

29. I have taken *sarvajanakam* to mean *sarvajananam* since it is clear that Bhāskararāya is referring to the initial creative role of the goddess Śakti as she is empowered by her own desire (*icchā*), action (*kriyā*), and knowledge (*jñāna*).

30. The second portion of the quotation is *Bṛhadāranyaka Upanisad,* 1.2.6; the first portion is unidentified.

31. *Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad,* 6.8.

32. Here Bhāskararāya uses established Upaniṣadic sources in order to affirm his own cosmology and to complete the pattern of threefold imagery the *Tripurā Upaniṣad* suggests from its outset.

33. According to oral traditions *śānta* is a technical term meaning "supreme" or "final" and is not used here in the usual sense of "peaceful." See Bhāskararāya's remarks on *Lalitāsahasranāma* no. 141 and the *Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.19.

34. In summary, oral tradition explains that according to *mantraśāstra* a sound is classified into four aspects of emanation from its primordial source. These are called *Parā, Paśyantī, Madhyamā,* and *Vaikharī.* The inherent nature is considered transcendent (*parā*) and unmanifest (*avyakta*) and so it is in a state of pre-articulated latency. As it begins the process of manifestation, sound emerges in the *mūlādhāra cakra* at the base of the spine in the human body; still unarticulated, it is called *Paśyantī* or "seen." It travels up the subtle channel called the *suṣumnā* and at the *anāhata cakra* located in the area of the heart it is called *madhyamā* or "middle" and is still unarticulated. When it reaches the point of articulation just above the *anāhata cakra* it is called *vaikharī* or "modified." For further textual references see *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 1.36–40, with commentaries and Bhāskararāya on *Lalitāsaharanāma* nos. 366, 368, 370, and 371.

35. Vāmā, Jyeṣṭhā, and Raudrī are the feminine consorts of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva respectively identified here with the three lines which make up the *trikoṇa* or innermost triangle of the *śrīcakra.* As the first triangle in the *śrīcakra* as it emanates from the central *bindu* (according to the *sṛṣṭi* or creation theory identifying the universe with the *śrīcakra*) these are the first three aspects of Brahman, the Absolute, to devolve. Hence they are identified with the first moments of dualistic consciousness, the first reflective awareness (*vimarśa*) of the "I" as an entity among other entities. Brahman, initially one, projects these three powers of Creation, Maintenance, and Destruction who are in turn responsible for the further projection of reality as it is understood through a knower, an object of knowledge, and a process of knowing. They are also identical to the sound emanations of *paśyantī, madhyamā,* and *vaikharī* as described in the previous note—the central *bindu* is identified with the *parā* aspect of Brahman as sound (*śabdabrahman*). A complete explanation of the symbolism of the triangles within the *śrīcakra* is given in Part One.

See also *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 1.18–19, 22, and 36–40.

36. By *Nityāhṛdaya* Bhāskararāya means the *Yoginīhṛdaya.* No other historical commentator or living adept is known to use this name, but it was clear to several who commented that this must be another name for the *Yoginīhṛdaya.* See *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 1.11, Kaviraj second edition, p. 17; Ānandāśrama edition of *Vāmakeśvaratantra,* p. 208.

Both the Dīpikākāra Amṛtānanda and Bhāskararāya in the *Setubandha* (on *Vāmakeśvaratantra*) uphold the interpretation that the three Little Mothers (*mātṛkās*), as these three aspects of the goddess are known, refer to the three primary evolutes of sound, that is, *paśyantī, madhyamā,* and *vaikharī* and that the "abode of universal waves" means the world construed through the thirty-six tattvas or primary elements. See *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 1.11, Kaviraj second edition, pp. 17ff.

37. See Rāmeśvara's *vṛtti* on *Paraśurāmakalpasūtra,* 10.30, where the same verse of *Kālikāpurāṇa* is quoted. *Paraśurāmakalpasūtra with Rāmeśvara's Commentary,* ed. A. Mahadeva Sastri, revised and enlarged by S. Y. Sastri Dave (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1st ed. 1923, 2d rev. ed. 1950, reprint 1979). (Gaekwad Oriental Series, no. 22.)

The reference here to *kuṇḍalinī śakti* is to the goddess as the latent yogic power envisioned as a serpent coiled three times around the *mūlādhāra cakra* of the human body.

38. In Bhāskararāya's interpretation of the *mantraśāstra* there are forty-eight letters in the Sanskrit alphabet and these are directly linked to the devolution of Brahman from primordial sound. The vowels are counted as sixteen: *a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, ṛ, ṝ, ḷ, ḹ, e, o, ai, au, aṃ* (*anusvara*), and *aḥ* (*visarga*). The sixteen consonants counted do *not* include the first consonant, *ka,* and are: *kha, ga, gha, ṅa, ca, cha, ja, jha, ña, ṭa, ṭha, ḍa, ḍha, ṇa, ta* and *tha.* Thus there are actually seventeen. The remaining consonants are the usual Sanskrit letters.

Bhāskararāya's version is noteworthy because he clearly excludes *ḷa,* the Vedic retroflex, *kṣa* (which he views as a compound of *ka* and *ṣa*) and *ha* (as a pure consonant, considering it rather to be an extension of the *visarga*). According to living adepts, this forty-eight letter version is the minority position, and virtually all the ritual handbooks, *including those of lineages claiming Bhāskararāya's inheritance,* use the fifty-one letter alphabet in their *mantraśāstra.* The proponents of the forty-eight-letter view observe that this number allows one to divide the total into three sets of sixteen which are esoterically "condensed" in the three *kūṭas* or lines that make up the sixteen-letter *śrīvidyā* mantra. The proponents of the fifty-one-letter view hold that the "extra" three letters fit nicely into the pattern of threes that pervade the symbolism of Tripurasundarī—as Bhāskararāya himself notes in the text.

39. An identical illustration is used in the Kashmiri Kṣemarāja's *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya* to argue the simultaneous existence of Śiva and Śakti in both latent and realized forms of the universe. See sūtra 4 where it says, *yathā ca evam bhagavān viśvāśarīram tathā citisaṅkocātmā saṃkucitavirūpaḥ, 'cotano' grāhako'pi vatadhānikāvat saṃkucitāśesavaviśvarūpaḥ/tathā ca siddhāntavacanaṃ//.*

40. Another explanation of why "*ha*" is not counted separately is that it is a mere reflection, a *vimarśa,* of the pure illumination, the *prakāśa,* seen in the letter "a." Cf. *Pratybhijñāhṛdaya,* 1 and *vṛtti.*

41. The verse is unidentified. It is likely to be from a Tantra.

42. Bhāskararāya on *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 1.11, quotes this half verse as *Saṅketapaddhati.* This text has yet to be discovered in manuscript. In his introductory remarks to the *Vāmakeśvaratantra* in his *Setubandha,* Bhāskararāya quotes the full verse but with no textual reference. (See p. 13 of Ānandāśrama edition.) This agrees with Amṛtānanda's half-verse quotation which also occurs on *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 1.11, leading us to suspect that Bhāskararāya may have had the Dīpikākara in mind. Amṛtānanda quotes this half verse again at *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 2.63cd–64ab. The full

verse as it appears in Bhāskararāya reads: *akāraḥ sarvavarṇāgraḥ prakāśaḥ paramaḥ śivaḥ/ hakāro'ntyah kalārūpo vimarśākhyaḥ prakīrtitaḥ//.*

Note that the following line in the text, *eta eva māṭṛkāḥ,* is redundant and is omitted following GOML and Adyar.

43. *Sūtasaṃhitā,* 4.47.64.

44. Bhāskararāya once again demonstrates here his formidable erudition. He correctly explains the peculiar Vedic grammar of the verse. In classical Sanskrit the neuter nominative plural forms "*akṣara saṃniviṣṭā*" would be "*akṣarāni saṃniviṣṭānī.*" See Pāṇini 7.1.39 and Whitney's *Sanskrit Grammar,* entry 330c.

45. Emend to omit *tri-* in *tribindurūpām* following Adyar.

46. This *vārttika* has not been located.

47. The idea is that since the word *anuṣṭhāya* as it occurs in the verse is in a nonfinite form two alternatives appear to Bhāskararāya as viable, either "*asti,*" "it is," should be supplied or the action indicated by *anuṣṭhāya* is to be completed in some later verse. The former is likely to be more acceptable to both the sense of the verse and to Bhāskararāya's interpretation. What is unusual about this remark is that commentators usually give their preferred interpretations last.

48. Bhāskararāya is dissatisfied with usual sense of *ajarā* (f.) (the alpha-privative "*a*" plus *jarā*) as "without decay or old age" and interprets the *Dhātupāṭha*'s listing to suggest further that the goddess is not only "without decay" but has completely conquered death, that is, She is beyond the cycles of death and rebirth.

49. Bhāskararāya shows his true colors here by placing Śakti even above Śiva, a point that other Śāktas hesitate to make so explicitly since they are themselves outwardly Śaivite in the broadest sense. The name Rudra subordinated to Śakti may well be tolerated in Śaiva-Śākta circles but not Śiva. Several living adepts made a point of this subtle suggestion by remarking that in the final analysis Śiva and Śakti must be considered identical and equal: a point Bhāskararāya makes at the very end of the commentary.

Emend *atiprasiddhānām* to *nāmnā prasiddhānām* following GOML and Adyar.

50. Emend *tadrūpā* to *tadrūpā ca* following GOML and Adyar.

51. Bhāskararāya implies that each aspect of a deity has a separate *vidyā,* that is, both a science or method or worship and a distinct mantra (also a meaning of the word *vidyā*). He also seems to suggest a kind of hierarchy beginning with Śakti, followed by Śiva, Viṣṇu, and the rest. Note also that he calls the text here only *Tripuropaniṣad,* omitting the "*mahā*" adjective, as do other commentators usually (cf. Rāmānanda and Upaniṣadbrahmayogin).

52. Bhāskararāya implies here that each deity may have his or her own method or science of worshiping Śakti. The compound's construction is also revealing: Śiva is listed first, followed by Viṣṇu and then "others," suggesting a kind of descending order or hierarchy of teaching and qualification (*adhikāra*).

53. This passage has not been located in the *Padmapurāṇa* but Bhāskararāya quotes it again under *Lalitāsahasranāma* no. 231 as coming from this source.

54. Bhāskararāya is further suggesting that all other deities are but beggars in comparison to Śakti. Worshiping other deities will bring one only to a certain level of accomplishment, that is, confer only a certain degree of wealth, just as begging from a beggar limits one to certain ends. Worshipping Śakti, however, places no

limits on the possibilities. This interpretation follows living oral tradition. The aphorism is quoted again by Bhāskararāya under *Lalitāsahasranāma* no. 64.

55. Bhāskararāya quotes the same verse under *Lalitāsahasranāma* no. 297 but there calls his work the *Śivastava*. Nothing more is known about this work since it has never been recovered. The proverb cited above also occurs again here.

On the forms of the Vedic rituals mentioned in the verse, see A. B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Vedas and Upaniṣads* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), pp. 326–39. (Vols. 31 and 32 of the Harvard Oriental Series.)

56. Emend *viśeṣyatābhiprāyena* to *viśeṣyatvābhiprāyena* following Adyar.

57. *Atharva Veda,* 10.22.1–2. Bhāskararāya in the *Setubandha* on *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 1.6, quotes the same passage and suggests that it belongs to both the *saunakaśākha* of the Atharva Veda and the *tattirīyaśākha* of the Yajur Veda. The Yajurvedins read the epithet, he says, in the nominative case. Regarding the *saunakaśākha* of the Atharva Veda and recensions of this text, see Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature,* p. 120 n. 2; on the *taittirīyaśākha* of the *Yajur Veda* see Winternitz, pp. 169–70.

58. Emend *tadartha* to *tad uktam* and read *brahmavida eva viduḥ nānya iti.* Cf. *Setubandha* on *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 1.1–6.

59. The primary sense of the nine *Yonis* is their identification with the *yoginīs* or subsidiary deities of Śakti placed on the sub-*cakras* of the *śrīcakra* in the course of Śrīvidyā *pūjā*. These nine sets of *yoginīs* called *navayoni* and are the presiding deities over the nine sub-*cakras*.

Emend to add *navayonīti* following Adyar.

60. The verse translated according to the interpretation of Upaniṣadbrahmayogin would read: "In whom there are nine *Yonis* and nine *cakras* and nine disciplines (*yogas*) and nine *Yoginīs* are shining. In the nine basic levels (*bhūmis*) there are the presiding deities of the *cakras* who are the guardian deities (*syonā*), the nine *Bhadrās* and the nine *mudrās*."

According to Rāmānanda: "The nine *Yonis* and the nine *cakras* are shining; there are nine conjunctions (*yogas*) and nine *Yoginīs* [presiding]; there are nine presiding deities of the *cakra;* [the presiding deity of the *cakra*] *syonā* means 'of the form of happiness'; there are nine *mudrās* and nine *bhadrās*."

For an alternative translation according to Upaniṣadbrahmayogin, see Krishna-Warrier's as listed in the Bibliography.

61. The threefold nature of the *bindu* is technically described in terms of its three primary qualities, *nāda, bindu,* and *kalā. Nāda* refers to sound in its primordial sense, that is, the first unarticulated essence that precedes the three stages of speech. It is the same as the *parā* aspect that subsumes the usual three forms of sound, namely, *paśyantī, madhyamā,* and *vaikharī*. Insofar as Brahman is considered in its sound form (*śabdabrahman*), *nāda* is the term designating its latent potentiality, that is, its power to become increasingly more manifest. The second quality, *bindu,* indicates a technical use of the term. Like many Tantric terms, *bindu* is used in a variety of contexts to indicate very different types of forms or properties. (Regarding these usages, see *HT,* pp. 94f.) In this case *bindu* refers to the correlative concept *nāda;* it is the static or permanent element that underlies the emerging form of manifest sound. It is, as were, a "drop" (as its literal sense indicates) of concentrated power that forms the basis of the expansion (*prapañca*)

that assumes the physical shape of sounds and the *bījākṣaras* of the *śrīcakra*. (In this sense of latent potentiality it is also suggestive of sperm.) *Kalā* is the third aspect of the *śrīcakra*'s central *bindu*. It refers to the power of particularization, that is, the inherent capacity of the One to assume many forms.

62. Bhāskararāya here cites an entry in the *Dhātupāṭha* to explain the Vedic form of the verb.

63. An idea Bhāskararāya repeats in his *Setubandha* on *Yoginīhṛdaya* 1.12–13; cf. Amṛtānanda's *Dīpikā* on the same verses.

64. The detailed explanation of the *icchā-*, *kriyā-*, and *jñāna- śakti*s is given in Part One, but of immediate importance here is Bhāskararāya's effort to align the different sets of three that are part of the symbolism and meaning of the goddess as Tripurā, The Three Cities.

Icchā-, *kriyā-*, and *jñāna- śakti*s correspond respectively to *Vāmā, Jyeṣṭhā,* and *Raudrī* as well as to *paśyantī, madhyamā,* and *vaikharī* aspects of sound. Note however that in the next line of the text there is no mention of what corresponding male powers created Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Rudra. The chart below maps out the interidentifications made here.

	Bindu	
Śānta	*Ambikā*	*Parā*
icchāśakti	*Vāmā*	*paśyantī*
kriyāśakti	*Jyeṣṭhā*	*madhyamā*
jñānaśakti	*Raudrī*	*vaikharī*

The devolution of the universe envisioned from the *bindu* of the *śrīcakra* appears in the sets of three as shown above. Each of these correspond to a side of the inner *trikoṇa* sub-*cakra,* that is, to the right, top, and left sides of the first triangle from the *bindu* of the *śrīcakra*. By "nine deities" transformed into the nine *Yoni cakra*s Bhāskararāya means the nine in the three sets of three as in the chart above. As for which deity is identified with which sub-*cakra* of the *śrīcakra* he offers no correspondence. Sometimes Bhāskararāya suggests that devolution of the *śrīcakra* from *bindu* to nine entities corresponds to the central *trikoṇa* and the eight minor triangles of the *vasukoṇa cakra*—following this line of interpretation these would be the nine *cakra*s which are transformations of the nine *Yoni*s, each of which is one of the nine deities as listed.

Note that the word *cakre* in this line of the text is the perfect tense third person singular, *ātmanepada* of $\sqrt{}$*kṛ*.

65. The alternative explanation suggests that the nine *cakra*s created (taking *dīdhire* in the sense of the causative of *ut*+ $\sqrt{}$*pad*) the nine *Yoni*s as latent and realized impressions in the aspirant and corresponding to the set of nine *Yoginī*s that preside over the nine *cakras*. It is with these nine *Yoni*s (as mental impressions) that the actual nine sub-*cakra*s of the *śrīcakra* are identified and taken to be agents initiating action.

66. Bhāskararāya means the nine deities transformed into the nine *Yoni*s are identified with the nine triangles formed by the intersection of the two Śakti, downward-facing triangles, with the one Śiva, upward-facing triangle (what he calls the *Vahni* triangle). This intersection of three triangles produces the *vasukoṇa*

of eight minor triangles plus the central *trikoṇa*. The emerging portion of the *śrīcakra* is as below.

What Bhāskararāya means exactly by the nine *Yonis* throughout this discussion is never explicit. He suggests that the Yonis are the power behind or within each manifestation of reality represented by the emerging triangles. These are, in fact, aspects of the devolving supreme deity and are called *Yonis* by virtue of being triangular.

67. See the diagram of the *śrīcakra* according to the Kaula school in Appendix.

68. Bhāskararāya makes it clear that the remaining portions of the *śrīcakra* are all contained in a subtle form within these nine minor triangles created out of the initial intersection of the two major triangles. He says that first there was the undifferentiated in the form of the one *bindu;* subtly present was the central *trikoṇa* and only then the nine minor triangles formed by the intersection of two plus one. All the remaining *yoginī*s identified with each set of minor triangles, he says, are present within these nine minor triangles, as are each of the *yoginī*s identified with each set of minor triangles that are the sub-*cakras* of the *śrīcakra*.

69. *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 1.36. With this quotation begins a different subject, the description of the *śrīcakra* in its three-dimensional *Meru* form.

70. The idea is that not only is everything below the level of Brahman but that things are arranged in a specific order of devolution corresponding to the *śrīcakra*. Thus Brahman identified with the *bindu* becomes the *trikoṇa* which in turn becomes the *vasukoṇa,* and so forth.

71. See Part One for a discussion of the different forms and configurations of the *śrīcakra*.

Read a full stop in the text following "*bhūmikāḥ*."

72. These are the presiding deities of the *trikoṇa*. They are identical to the nine presiding deities over the nine sub-*cakras* of the *śrīcakra*, namely, *tripurā, tripureśī, tripurasundarī, tripuravāsinī, tripuraśrī, tripuramālinī, tripurāsiddhā, tripurāmbikā*, and *mahātripurasundarī*. The list proceeds from the outermost sub-*cakra,* the *trailokyamohana* consisting of the *bhūgṛha* (i.e., the *bhūpura*), and moves towards the *trikoṇa*.

Here ends the discussion of the *Meru* form of the *śrīcakra*.

73. Literally the word "*syonā*" means soft, gentle, or agreeable and appears to be of doubtful origin. Some contemporary adepts maintain that it is a Vedic term.

74. For a description of the nine principal *mudrā*s and others, see Part One.

75. *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 1.12.

76. *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 1.13. Amṛtānanda in the *Dīpikā* identifies the cakra here as the *śrīcakra* since it is ninefold. He also confirms Bhāskararāya's view that *navacakreśvarī,* the "goddess of the nine *cakras*," means the presiding deities of each of the nine sub-*cakras* of the *śrīcakra* as described above. According to Bhāskararāya in the *Setubandha,* the *navayoni cakra* is ninefold in its subtle nature (*vāsanatāpi*), meaning the eight mantras placed on each of the eight minor triangles of the *vasukoṇa* plus the *mūlavidyā* mantra of the *bindu*. Furthermore he contends that deities of the *trikoṇa* if divided by three come to nine. This elaboration is also mentioned in the *Setubandha* on *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 1.13.

77. Whose opinion this is is not clear since it is not that of the *Dīpikākara* Amṛtānanda.

78. "From the perspective of dissolution" refers to the method of describing the creation of the *śrīcakra* according to the *saṃhāra,* that is, from the outside towards the central *bindu*. Here, however, *saṃhāra cakra* refers to only the "essential" aspect of the *śrīcakra*, that is, from the *vasukoṇa* to the *bindu*. For a discussion of the three perspectives of the *śrīcakra*—the creation (*sṛṣṭi*), preservation (*sthiti*), and dissolution (*saṃhāra*)—see Part One on the *śrīcakra*.

79. Emend *mātṛ* to *mātrā* following Adyar and GOML.

80. Emend *sarvatropabṛṃhanāni* to *sarvopabṛṃhanāni* following Adyar and GOML.

Note here that Bhāskararāya cites Tantra and calls it *śruti,* that is, revelation, putting it on a par with the Vedas as scriptural authority. In other instances he uses the *śruti,* and particularly this text, to provide a scriptural foundation for certain ideas appearing in the Tantras.

81. Interpreted according to Upaniṣadbrahmayogin, the verse would translate: "Principally she was One, became nine, then nineteen and then twenty-nine and forty-three. Manifestly, let these three mothers as it were desirous [of doing good to their young] enter into me."

According to Rāmānanda, "She was One, became nine, nineteen, twenty-nine and then forty-three. Desirous and with a friendly heart, let the Mother enter into me from the *mūlādhāra* to the other cakras." What is noteworthy here is the fact that Rāmānanda, known for his elaborate comments, offers only one short paragraph for the interpretation of the whole verse.

82. The five physical or gross (*sthūla*) elements (*bhūtas*) are air (*vayu*), water (*ap*), earth (*pṛthvī*), fire (*agni*), and space (*ākāśa*). The five subtle elements, however, are less clear. One plausible interpretation is maintained in contemporary oral traditions since there is no textual reference listing these—that is, that the five subtle elements are the corresponding subtle mantric emanations of the gross elements. This makes sense since the goddess is spoken of in gross and subtle forms corresponding respectively to the anthropomorphic or visible shape and the "subtle" mantra. What this means in these contexts is that it is the combination of the mantric seed-syllable, identified as the subtle element, with the gross element itself that brings about the *tanmātras* or "essences." These "essences" are themselves, it would appear, in subtle and gross forms, that is as ordinary forms and as corresponding mantric aspects. The gross elements correspond to the gross *tanmātras* as follows:

space/*ākāśa* = sound/*śabda*
air/*vayu* = touch/*sparśa*
fire/*agni* = form/*rūpa*
water/*ap* = taste/*rasa*
earth/*pṛthvī* = smelll/*gandha*

83. Here there can be little doubt what Bhāskararāya means. The organs of action (*karmendriyas*) are the legs, larynx, feet, hands, and sexual organ, while the organs of knowledge (*jñānendriyas*) are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and skin. The four inner organs (*antaḥkaraṇa*) are the mind (*manas*), judgment (*buddhi*), intellect (*citta*), and ego (*ahaṃkāra*). These lists are shared by virtually all classical Hindus while the interpretation of each differs according to school.

84. *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 1.16. What Bhāskararāya intends here is to identify the *śrīcakra*'s inner ten minor triangles with the ten gross (physical) and subtle elements, the outer ten minor triangles with the ten *tanmātras* or "essences," and the fourteen triangles of the *manvaśra* (sub-) *cakra* with the organs of action and knowledge plus the four inner organs (as described above).

85. For Bhāskararāya the creation of the universe as the *śrīcakra* proceeds by an expansion up to the fourteen minor triangles of the *manvaśra* sub-*cakra,* that is, the one *bindu* becomes nine as the *trikoṇa* plus the eight minor triangles of the *vasukoṇa;* after this comes the two sets of ten minor triangles bringing the total, as he says, to twenty-nine. To these are added the outmost set of fourteen minor triangles; it is these "previously mentioned fourteen" that are identified with the five respective organs of action and knowledge and the four parts of the inner organ (*antaḥkaraṇa*) as mentioned above. The whole act of creation is, however, found in microcosm in the first expansion to nine; the subsequent description is a mere elaboration in his eyes. What is important is the fact that the remaining portions of the *śrīcakra*, that is, the sets of lotus petals and the sets of lines are not included in the description thus far. Their roles are given later.

86. Bhāskararāya discounts the *bindu* in his calculation of the presiding deities of the *śrīcakra* once it expands beyond its original form. He calls the *bindu* "formless" (*nirākāra*) since it has not moved into the realm of "threes" that make up reality as we understand it ordinarily. This interpretation brings the total number of presiding deities (*yoginīs*) identified with the minor triangles to the correct number, forty-three.

Emend to read: *binducakrasya nirākāratvena ekā sāsīd ity asya yonyākṛtīnam madhye na pariganananam//*. This follows both Adyar and GOML in part.

87. The "mothers" (*mātṛkās*) are the *yoginīs* of the forty-three minor triangles of the *śrīcakra.*

88. Bhāskararāya has in mind the Indian belief that the cows, having grazed during the day, are by evening anxious to be with their young and hasten on their own back to the cowshed. The simile suggests the anxiety feeling of separation from the Mother and the hope of the devotee that the *yoginīs* will hasten into him during the time of *pūjā.*

89. *Nyāsa,* literally, "laying down," refers to the process of identification of sounds with parts of the body and the *śrīcakra* as part of the contemplative worship. See *HT,* pp. 136f. for a detailed discussion of its significance in Tantric traditions.

90. This verse remains unidentified.

91. Emend *mandalayanti* in the verse to *mandayanti,* correcting the printing error in the Avalon text.

92. Read *katipayatantrasiddhāntah* following GOML. Here Bhāskararāya makes clear that the *vṛttatraya,* or three lines, found on the *śrīcakra* are not to be placed outside the sixteen-petalled lotus as it usually appears. Instead he says the three lines occur in between the sets of sub-*cakras.*

93. *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 1.19. Bhāskararāya here shifts to an explanation of the *śrīcakra* from the outer gateways of the *bhūgṛha* towards the central *bindu.*

Amṛtānanda observes in his *Dīpikā* on this verse a reading which shifts the word order, thus making discussion consistent with the "inside out" explanation without adopting it.

94. The "ancient teaching" is reflected in the opinion of Amṛtānanda in his *Dīpikā* on *Yoginīhṛdaya* 1.19.

95. The source of this verse has not been identified. Bhāskararāya seems to stretch the meaning of the verse since its more natural interpretation would identify the two sets of eight and sixteen lotus petals of the *śrīcakra* with *Soma* and *Agni*. Bhāskararāya, however, takes it as referring to the three circles, not the lotus petals, and adds the identification of the third line with *Sūrya*. Because the verse's source is unknown it is particularly difficult to assess Bhāskararāya's interpretation.

96. Emend *vṛttānyagnisūryasomaguṇa-* to *vṛttany agnisūryasomarūpa.*

97. The idea is that when a flame burns, like a candle, there appears a kind of black, sootish residue (called in Sanskrit *kajjalam*), confirming the idea that a flame of fire (*agnijvalam*) is dominated by the *tamas* or dark *guṇa* of the material world.

98. Emend *tamastvoktāvasāñjatya* to *tamastvoktyāsāṅgatya;* also emend *ity avyayam* to *ity avyayam tat.*

99. To justify his interpretation that sunlight moves horizontally, Bhāskararāya here quotes the *Māghakāvya* 1.2 as cited in the Avalon edition.

100. *Māgha,* 1.2.

101. Emend *-viśeṣaṇam agnito vailakṣaṇyadṛḍhīkārāya* to *-viśeṣanam agnitejovailakṣaṇyadṛḍhīkārāya;* cf. GOML. What Bhāskararāya means by the "peculiar nature" (*vailakṣaṇa)* of fire is that it is at once called "light" and is dominated by the *guṇa* of darkness (*tamas*) permeating its material nature—these two characteristics are in apparent contradiction, since light and darkness are considered mutually exclusive of each other.

102. Emend *tantrāntare* to *tantrāntaresu* following Adyar and GOML.

103. Available editions of the *Tantrarāja Tantra* do not support Bhāskararāya's view but the text has not yet been critically and definitively edited.

104. That is, rather than taking the three lines to mean the three lines that make up the gateways of the *bhūpura.*

105. The word *viṣṭapā* occurring here in compound with *tri-* appears to be another example of the author using deliberately archaic vocabulary in the text.

106. *Aṇima,* the power to make oneself small, is the first of the ten powers or *siddhi*s acquired by identifying them with the *bhūgṛha* during the *śrīcakra pūjā.*

107. See *Aṣṭādhyāyī,* 1.4.81 and 1.4.82. Bhāskararāya is justifying his alternative reading of *atra madano madanī āprathete* and is suggesting the antiquity of this Upaniṣad is shown by its use of Vedic grammar.

108. Emend to add *manditiketyādi* following Adyar.

109. This has not been found in *Padmapurāṇa.* In line 1 emend to omit *ityādī,* following Adyar and GOML; in line 6 place a period following *ityādinī.* Regarding the *pīṭha*s or seats of the Goddess in various pilgrimage centers, see D. C. Sircar, *The Śākta Pīthas* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, reprint, 1973).

110. According to Rāmānanda, "The meaning is that the qualities of the Supreme Kāmeśvara [Śiva] are enumerated without interference." The Sanskrit

text reads: *ajasram niravadhikakāmeśvaraguṇān āmṛedayantīty arthaḥ*. Bhāskararāya's interpretation is not entirely clear, and I have followed Rāmānanda's suggestion, which does not seem opposed to Bhāskararāya.

111. See the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtras*, 1.1.25, according to the Avalon edition's note.

112. The different reading also follows Upaniṣadbrahmayogin's interpretation although he too identifies the text with the *Ṛg Veda*, as does Bhāskararāya. Since Bhāskararāya attributes the different reading to a difference between the two Vedic schools it is not clear, in light of Upaniṣadbrahmayogin, if the actual distinction is strictly the difference between schools or if there is merely a difference of opinion over which term is "correct." It is clear, however, that Bhāskararāya does not view the text as utterly inviolate: different readings *can* arise depending upon who is doing the reading.

113. Emend *tatra* to *tatratya* following Adyar and GOML.

114. Emend *viṣayabhānapramosapūrvakam* to *viṣayabhāvanapramodapūrvakam* following Adyar and GOML; also emend *bhavanti* to *bhajanti* following GOML.

115. Emend *amṛtokaranam* to *itthaṃ amṛtokaranam.*

116. Emend *tadābhimānnidevatāyām* to *tadabhimānadevatāyāḥ* following Adyar and GOML.

117. This quotation is not found in the printed editions of the *Rudrayāmala* but the title is often used as a catchall for stray verses without clear attribution. This may be the case here.

118. These verses attributed to *Devībhāgavata* have not been located.

119. The word *śrīvidyā* may also be interpreted as meaning the mantra. Thus one must first be initiated into the *śrīvidyā* mantra; but the suggestion here seems more encompassing and it has been taken in the broader sense of the larger initiation process.

I am indebted to Dr. Gary Tubb for deciphering the meaning of this particularly difficult and obscure passage. From the portion of the text beginning *śrīvidyādīkṣito dravyavatā* to the conclusion of this verse's commentary I rely wholly on his work.

120. *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra,* 1.31.

121. Emend *pranīyādi* to *pranīyād*. The first example of an injunctive mantra is well known while the latter two are somewhat confusing and unclear. Because all versions of the text include these two rather confusing examples they have been included in the translation. It should be clear that Bhāskararāya intends them to be injunctive mantras similar to the standard example.

122. Concerning the statements relating to Agni and the *homa*-sacrifices, in these a third-person indicative ending is used but the Vedic interpreters (according to the *Bṛhatī,* p. 286) have concluded that such *agneyavākya*s should be taken as if they are imperatives. In other words by assuming the imperative for the indicative third-person present *mandanti* meaning "he pleases," it should be taken to mean "he should please." According to oral traditions, the verbal root √*mad,* to be intoxicated, has an imperative sense, here indicating a kind of activity related only to one's own self as it is identified with the universal consciousness; thus by pleasing oneself one pleases the universal deity. Concerning Bhāskararāya's remark, "by the logic [explained] in the chapter [in the Mīmāṃsā texts] concerning *bhavārtha,*" see the *Bṛhatī* with Prabhākāra's commentary, the chapter entitled

bhavārthādhikaraṇa in *Bṛhatī of Prabhākāra Miśra (on the Mīmāṃsaka Sūtrabhāṣya of Śābara) with the Ṛjuvimala Pañcika of Śālikanātha,* ed. S. Subrahmanya Sastri (Madras: University of Madras Publications, 1962), p. 286.

123. *Matvārthalakṣanā* is a type of metaphorical interpretation explained in *Mīmāṃsā* texts. Oral traditionalists in Śrīvidyā explain it this way: "Like other instances of *lakṣanā* here too a secondary or metaphorical interpretation is necessary because the primary sense of the word does not fit. *Matvārthalakṣanā* is that type of metaphor in which a word signifying a particular object is interpreted as signifying what possesses that object. It is called 'possessing the object' (*matvārtha-*) because the object (*artha*) possesses by virtue of the sense of the suffix *mat*. [Thus *matvārtha* means "having the sense of a possessive suffix (*matu*) For example, when we say 'soma sacrifice' (*somayāga*) a doubt arises as to how it should be interpreted. Does it mean that it is a sacrifice qualified by the presence of *soma* or does it mean that it is a sacrifice in the form of *soma*? In other words, instead of saying that the sacrifice is qualified by *soma* it could be said that the sacrifice is the *soma* itself, and thereby suggesting the primary sense of the word *soma*. This argument is refuted by asserting that *soma* is a substance (*dravya*) to be used in a sacrifice and as such it cannot be identified with the sacrifice itself since it is a mere accessory (*aṅga*) to it. Thus the primary sense of the word *soma* cannot give a coherent meaning to the sentence and *lakṣaṇā* must be resorted to, which is to say that *soma* means *somavat,* that is, that which *possesses soma*. Now here the word 'wine' referring to the sacrifice in which it is found as an accessory is further interpreted as being in the imperative sense."

124. The translation follows oral interpretations of the text. The dictum (*nyāya*) used by Bhāskararāya is explained in oral tradition: "In the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 6.1.6.7 there is a statement, 'He should purchase a year-old calf of red color and yellow eye'. Here the year-old calf is the primary consideration of the purchase but not the red color and the yellow eye which are only accidental. These characteristics, therefore, are not the conditions for purchase but they do distinguish the year-old calf from any other. Similarly in this sentence the one contemplative activity alone is important and not any of the accidental characteristics which are only partial descriptions of it."

See V. S. Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary,* rev. and enlarged ed. (Poona, 1957, reprinted Kyoto, Japan: Rinsen Book Company), Appendix E, p. 67. Here the dictum is rephrased, though it conveys a similar notion: *phalavatsānnidhāvaphalam tadangam.* Cf. *Śābarabhāṣya* on *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra,* 4.4.19. Note that Bhāskararāya uses the identical dictum to make a similar point in the *Setubandha* on *Nityāṣoḍaśīkārnava.*

125. *Vyāsajyavṛtti* means that each of the human aims is fully a goal so long as each of the others is also fully a goal.

126. This reference to the *Samayācārasmṛti* is particularly interesting since it suggests a sectarian literature associated with the Samaya school of Śrīvidyā. Among historical commentators Lakṣmīdhara is the best-known Samayācārin and one might expect this quotation to turn up in his commentary on the *Saundaryalaharī* since no text of this title is recorded. This is not the case and the verse remains unidentified. It is also not possible to state definitively that the work's title confirms

the existence of literature belonging exclusively to the Samaya school since "*samayācāra*" might well only mean "those who practice with discipline" and there are no other specific Samaya works other than ritual handbooks (*paddhatis* and *nibandhas*).

127. The source of this passage is unidentified.

128. Though Bhāskararāya says this verse occurs in the Purāṇas, its source remains unidentified.

129. Verse 8 of the Upaniṣad is quoted by Bhāskararāya in his *Saubhāgyabhāskara,* the commentary on *Lalitāsahasranāma* 1.17. Here the text is called *Tripurāsūkta* and is said to be part of the *Ātharvaṇapātha,* that is, belonging to the *Ātharvaṇa* school.

130. *Kantharavena* is here taken to mean "out loud" or "orally."

On the identification of the Śrīvidyā mantra with the famous Vedic *gāyatrī,* see Part One.

131. This verse is not found in the printed editions of the *Devībhāgavatam.* What is noteworthy is the fact that the verse itself imitates the structure and meter of the *Ṛg* Vedic *gāyatrī,* a pattern that other *gāyatrī*s also follow. These mantras are especially important in the worship of particular aspects of gods found in more localized contexts. At the famous temple in Cidambaram, for example, a *gāyatrī* is designed for the consort of *Naṭarāja, Śivakāmasundarī*, and is passed as secret lore among the traditional priests.

132. Bhāskararāya begins to reveal the fifteen-lettered form of the Śrīvidyā mantra here by making oblique references to certain deities associated with specific syllables. This is the technique of initiates who will usually not make explicit the mantra itself either by writing it or uttering it aloud. The code, however, is quite clear provided the clues are carefully considered in the setting of oral tradition and the *mantraśāstra*. The words *mātariśva* and *kāma* both indicate the syllable *ka* associated with the four-faced god Brahmā.

133. Sixteen vowels are counted here, making the long *ī* and *e* the fourth and eleventh respectively. They are: *a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, ṛ, ṝ, ḷ, ḹ, e, o, ai, au, aṃ* (*anusvara*), and *aḥ* (*visarga*).

134. Counting the semivowels as four, namely, *ya, ra, la,* and *va, la* is the third. This completes the first *kūṭa* or set of syllables in the fifteen-lettered Śrīvidyā mantra, as shown below.

Mātariśva/Kāma = *ka*
Yoni = *e*
Kamalā = *ī*
Indra/Vajrapāni = *la*
Bhuvaneśvarī bījāksara = *hrīṃ*

These syllables taken in order are the first five elements of the *kādi*-version of the *śrīvidyā,* making up the first kūṭa.

In the second *kūṭa* the mantra is revealed somewhat differently:

svarūpa or in its "own [explicit] form" = *ha*
svarūpa also = *sa*
Mātariśva = *ka*
Abha = *ha*
Indra = *la*
Punarguhā (literally "the secret again")
the *bījākṣara* of *Bhuvaneśvarī* = *hrīṃ*

In the third *kūṭa* the first three letters are in their explicit forms while the *Bhuvaneśvarī bījākṣara* is identified with the goddess as *Māyā,* thus the *kūṭa* reads *sa, ka, la, hrīṃ.*
The *śrīvidyā* itself in its *kādividyā* form is complete:
ka e ī la hrīṃ
ha sa ka ha la hrīṃ
sa ka la hrīṃ

For a complete discussion, see Part One.

135. *Purūcī* is an obscure term and it would appear that this is yet another effort to portray the Upaniṣad as an ancient, indeed, an archaic work. Neither Upaniṣadbrahmayogin nor Rāmānanda offer much elucidation on the meaning of the term; the translation follows Bhāskararāya's gloss.

136. See *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 2.26ff., and the *Setubandha.* Here each letter of the mantra is assigned a mystical identification with various aspects of the universe.

137. *Varivasyārahasya and its commentary Prakāśa by Śrī Bhāskararāya Makhin,* edited with English translation by Pt. S. Subrahmanya Sastri (Adyar, Madras: Adyar Library and Research Center, 1934, fourth edition, 1976).

138. The three syllables are *ka, e,* and *ī.*

139. Śiva here in His supreme aspect is viewed from the *saguna* perspective, that is, as having qualities, the predominant quality (*guṇa*) being purity (*sattva*). From the *saguṇa* perspective Śiva has assumed *upādhi*s, limitations, that give Him His conceptual form.

The substitution intended by Bhāskararāya puts the sixth, seventh, and eighth syllables of the *kādividyā śrīvidyā, ha, sa,* and *ka* in place of the first three syllables, *ka, e,* and *ī.* The *hādividyā śrīvidyā* then is:

ha sa ka la hrīṃ
ha sa ka ha la hrīṃ
sa ka la hrīṃ

140. Note that the word *tuṣṭuvāṃsaḥ* is a Vedic form derived from the verbal root √*stu,* to praise. It is the *parismaipada* of the perfect participle in the sense of an agent, that is, "those who have praised." See A. A. MacDonnell, *Vedic Grammar* (Delhi: Indological Book House, reprint edition, 1968), p. 363.

Bhāskararāya interprets the verb *bhajante,* third-person plural present *ātmanepada* of √*bhaj,* with an injunctive sense. He glosses it with *bhavayet,* the third-person singular optative causative *parasmaipada* of √*bhū,* to be; again this is technical *Mīmāṃsā* terminology.

141. Following Śaṅkarācārya's division of the *Brahmasūtra,* the *adhikaraṇa* is called *īkṣatyādhikaraṇa* beginning at 1.1.5 and ending at 1.1.12. Bhāskararāya extends the *adhikaraṇa* to at least 1.1.16 where this quotation from the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* occurs. Cf. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad,* 2.6.

142. Called *janmādyadhikaraṇa,* it is *Brahmasūtra,* 1.1.2–1.1.4.

143. The standard Śaiva point of view is expressed here, namely, that Śiva is the creator of the Vedas. The Vedas in Śaiva-Śākta theology are *apauruṣeya* only insofar as they are not of human origin.

144. *Varṇaka* is the technical term in Vedānta for the two interpretations of the *sūtra, śāstrayotvam;* one takes *śāstrayoni* as an exocentric (*bahuvrīhi*) compound, the

other as a dependent determinative (*tatpuruṣa*) compound, but either way it refers to *brahma*.

145. The *śāstrayoni adhikaraṇa* is *Brahmasūtra* 1.1.3–1.1.4.

146. *Kulārṇava Tantra,* 4.114–15.

147. The quotation is unidentified. Emend *japet* to *sūksmopāstau* following Adyar.

148. *Jñānārṇava Tantra,* 12.4.

149. This reference to *Brahmaṇḍa Purāṇa* is actually *Lalitāsahasranāma,* 1.17cd. *Lalitāsahasranāma* is considered a portion of the Purāṇa.

150. Cf. *Setubandha* on *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 1.24, where the qualification for the *śrīvidyā* is discussed; also *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 2.14, where Bhāskararāya refers to the differing opinions concerning *kādi-* and *hādividyās*.

151. See *Saundaryalaharī,* 32–33. Bhāskararāya's point is that since both mantras are of equal status Śaṅkara has chosen to present *hādividyā* first though *kādividyā* is given priority. Among the commentators on *Saundaryalaharī* only Lakṣmīdhara interprets verse 32 as *kādividyā*—all others, including Kaivalyāśrama and Kāmeśvarapāṇḍita, take it to indicate *hādividyā.*

152. Bhāskararāya clearly sides with Kaivalyāśrama and the other commentators who interpret verse 32 of *Saundaryalaharī* as *hādividyā* and discredits Lakṣmīdhara whom he may well have had in mind since he is aware of the Samayācāra school's interpretations.

Emend to add *smarayonilakṣmīpādānām* after *śivaśaktikāmapādānām* following Adyar.

153. The example referred to here is explained in the *parnamayi adhikaraṇa* under *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra,* 4.3.1. The passage referred to there is *yasya parnamayi juhur bhavati na sa papam ślokam sṛṇoti,* "He whose spoon is made of *palasa* wood hears no evil report [of himself]."

154. According to oral traditions, the distinctive trait of an *arthavāda* statement is that it serves as an inducement to action rather than strictly as a command. In other words, if one does "x" then "y" will be gained, thus one should do "x." The distinctions between *mantra, vidhi,* and *arthavāda* are variously interpreted in *Mīmāṃsā* traditions.

155. Previously Bhāskararāya had taken *amṛtam bhajante* as a *vidhi,* an injunction, and here he qualifies his view that the statement is actually an *arthavāda,* a statement of inducement. Can a declarative statement, a mantra, be a *vidhi?* The earlier answer was yes. Now he asks can a mantra be an *arthavāda* and answers yes again. According to oral traditions there are two types of *arthavāda,* the first sort being an encouragement to act, i.e., mere praise, but not necessarily a proven or accomplished fact, while the second, the *bhūtārthavāda,* is an accomplished fact and is necessarily true. This second type is what is intended here.

Bhāskararāya has in mind statements concerning mantra repetition, *japa,* which he considers not merely *arthavādas* but *bhūtārthavādas*. The argument is that the knowledge that liberates, embodied in the mantra, is not new; that is, it is an accomplished fact (*bhūta*) and not something yet to come into being (*bhavya*). Oral tradition asserts that knowledge merely removes adventitious obstacles, thus when *japa* is performed the mind becomes so pure that the obstacles are dispelled. It can be said then that through *japa* the aspirant attains mokṣa though technically it is not the *japa itself* that brings about the liberation, it merely removes the obstacles, allowing the natural state of liberation to shine through.

156. By three kinds of contemplative worship Bhāskararāya means *upāsana* on the gross, subtle, and transcendent aspects of the goddess. He asserts that each form of *upāsana* leads to the same result but goes on to say that it is the collective worship of all three that brings about results. While the *upāsana* is usually hierarchically arranged according to the aspect worshiped, Bhāskararāya does not undervalue any of the three forms.

157. What Bhāskararāya means is that individually these acts do not bring about results, rather it is only collectively that they confer benefits.

158. According to oral tradition the cake offerings called *purodāsa* are made of brown rice and are offered in vessels or skulls, or they are made of ground-meal with clarified butter. The example is intended to show that the rice cakes are available only to one who has previously performed a *soma* sacrifice. But one who performs the *darśapūrṇamāsa* rites receives their fruit even if he omits the cakes because he is not eligible for them, though he must be eligible to perform the *darśapūrṇamāsa* rites in general. The point is somewhat obscured by Bhāskararāya's deliberate appeal to the nuances of Vedic ritual. The idea is that such external, physical elements as the cakes are not essential if one is qualified to fulfill successfully the rite's subtler aspects. Similarly, the grosser elements of worship (*upāsti*) may serve some essential purpose on a lower level of understanding and qualification, but they are not *essential* to anyone who is really qualified to fulfill successfully the demands of internal sacrifice (*antaryāga*).

While such activities are not essential for the advanced adept, Bhāskararāya earlier points out the virtues of continuing at least the appearance of the rites. He argues that it is salutary for setting an example for others. Living adepts add that a complete transformation of external to internal rites—and hence an abandonment of the external rites completely, as advocated by such figures as Lakṣmīdhara—is ill-advised since spiritual disciplines can easily degenerate. Bhāskararāya later clearly separates himself from Lakṣmīdhara's more unequivocal stand advocating a supplanting of external with internal rites. He does not dispute, however, that internal sacrifices are superior or that external acts are no longer *essential* to the higher adept.

159. This statement in the *Prātiśākhya* is unidentified. What Bhāskararāya means here is that one could read either *tad īle* or *tad īḍe* in the verse. This is yet another example of Bhāskararāya's treatment of the Upaniṣad as Vedic text exhibiting the peculiarities of Vedic grammar.

160. Emend *sañjātaḥ* to *ādeśa* following Adyar.

161. Emend *naduḥspṛṣthadeśa* to *tu na lādeśaḥ*.

162. Bhāskararāya has in mind the identification of the fifteen (or sixteen) *nityās* each representing a day on the lunar calendar. There are at least two prominent opinions as to how this is to be performed. According to the first, during the *śuklapakṣa*, or bright half of the lunar month as the moon waxes, the deities are placed counterclockwise beginning at the base of the *vasukoṇa*, five to each side of the triangle. In this procedure one begins with Kāmeśvara and ends with Citrā. But during the *kṛṣṇapakṣa*, or dark half of the lunar month as the moon

wanes, the order of the *nityās* is reversed, that is, Citrā is first and Kāmeśvara last. Also in the *kṛṣṇapakṣa* the *bījākṣaras aṃ, au, ai, e,* and *o* precede the name of the *nityā*. This practice is common today among South Indian Śrīvidyā adepts. According to the *Nityotsava* of Umānandanātha, a work that one would suspect reflects Bhāskararāya's own views since it is authored by his most famous disciple, there is no mention of this reversal of identification. Rāmeśvara on the *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra* is silent on the matter. In contemporary *paddhatis* the majority opinion is that no such reversal occurs, but there are, as it were, no textual authorities to which one can refer to reflect on the practice historically.

163. *Jñānārṇava Tantra,* 16.36cd–39ab. Bhāskararāya's reading, however, differs from that of the Ānandāśrama edition. The variants are:

	Bhāskararāya	Ānandāśrama
v. 36cd	*agradakṣo-*	*pūrvadakṣo-*
v. 37ab	*paśca*t	*tatra*
	ha	*hi*
v. 37 cd	*anukarānta*	*uvarnānta*
	dakṣiṇāyām	*dakṣiṇasyam*
v. 38ab	*dīrghakaranādi*	*ukarādi*
v. 39 ab	*anusvārantam madhye*	*anusvārantamantrastu*

Emend 36cd to *dakṣagrauttarakramāt;* emend 37cd to *uvarnanta;* emend 38ab to *ukārādi.*

164. Emend *ityādinā tantre nirdistah* to *ityādinā tantrāntare nirdistah* following Adyar.

165. The source of the verse is unidentified.

166. *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa,* 3.10.1, following the citation in the Avalon edition.

167. Emend *tripurasundaro ādityasvarūpā* to *tripurasundarītyādi nityāsvarūpa.*

168. Bhāskararāya's description reverses the order in the verse, that is, the two breasts are placed above, below is the face. The term *hakārārdha,* literally "half the letter *ha,*" indicates the female organ. The picture Bhāskararāya has in mind is as follows:

0 0
0
0

This generates a triangle with a central *bindu* representing the *trikoṇa* and *bindu* and also a representation of the female organ meditated upon in the *kāmakalādhyāna.*

169. *Saundaryalaharī,* 19abc.

170. Emend *sat* to *tad.*

171. *Sundarīhṛdaya* is the *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 2.54cd. Bhāskararāya reads *maṇḍalatrayarūpantu* for *maṇḍalatrayayuktam*, the latter reading appearing in the Kaviraj's third edition (p. 154).

172. Emend *śīrśādighantikāntaḥ* to *śīrśādikanthāntaḥ* following Adyar and GOML.

173. Here Upaniṣadbrahmayogin reads *cikitvā* and glosses it as *dhyatvā,* "thought" or "reflection." Bhāskararāya chooses the *viditvā* reading and gives it the same interpretation.

174. *Saundaryalaharī* 19cdefgh, omitting the first word cd, *hārārdham*.

175. Emend *kāmarūpatvakāmyatvakāmaḥ* to *kāmarūpatvakāmaḥ* following Adyar.

176. *Nityāṣoḍaśīkārṇava,* I.201. Note that the configuration of the *bījākṣara klīṃ* in the devanāgari script is suggested as an esoteric form of the *kāmakalā*. Thus,

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On *saparārdha* identified with the female organ as half the letter *ha,* see *Vāmakeśvarimata with the commentary of Rājanaka Jayaratha,* ed. M. K. Sastri (Srinagar, India, 1945; Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies, vol. 64, p. 75).

177. Omit *annādyakāmanāphalakāveṣṭher iva* following GOML 2 and oral traditions.

178. This phrase occurs in neither the *Śāṇḍilya* nor *Nārada Bhaktisūtras*.

179. Emend to place the *daṇḍa* after *caturtham* following Adyar.

180. The term *kuṇḍagolodbhava* is cryptic but according to oral traditions it refers to a portion of the female organ. The usual lexical meaning is an illegitimate child, while here the meaning is as a synonym for the female organ, the *yoni.*

181. The source of the phrase is unidentified.

182. *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra,* 1.24. Emend the text to read *pratyāvamṛṣṭiḥ* for *pratyavamamṛṣtiḥ* following GOML 2 and the Dave edition of the *Paraśurāmakalpasūtra* (see Bibliography for details).

183. Exactly to whom Bhāskararāya is referring is unclear. This is not the reading of either Upaniṣadbrahmayogin or Rāmānanda, nor has the possibility appeared in consulted manuscripts of the Upaniṣad.

184. This maxim is based on the supposition that a crow has only one eye and can move it as the occasion permits from one socket to the other, suggesting that a word or a phrase used only once in a sentence can serve two purposes. Cf. V. V. Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary,* revised edition (Poona: 1957; reprinted, Kyoto, Japan: Rinsen Book Company, 1978), Appendix E, p. 58.

185. Emend *sūtroktānām* to *sūktoktānām*. This makes better sense since the reading of *ajam* would confuse the meaning of the verse. It is possible to retain the reading *sūtroktānām* and take it as referring to the *Paraśurāmakalpasūtra* verse cited above but this particular *sūtra* does not actually enumerate the *pañcamakāras*.

186. See *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra,* 6.3.21.

187. cf. *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra,* 1.31, the full quotation of the text reads: *bahvalpam vā svagṛhyoktam yasya yāvat prakīrtitam/ tasya tāvati śāstrārthe kṛte sarvaḥ kṛto bhavet//*

The idea Bhāskararāya means to convey is that the rituals, their number and methods of performance, differ according to which *gṛhyasūtra* is followed, and this differs from family to family.

188. cf. *The Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini*, ed. and trans. S. C. Vasu (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, reprint edition 1980), vol. 1, p. 286.

189. Emend *viśvajagajjananī* to *jagajjananī* following Adyar and GOML.

190. Taking the word *mātra,* only or merely, in *prāṇimātrasya* to mean *sarva,* all.

191. cf. *Lalitāsahasranāma*, nos. 10 and 11, with the *Saubhāgyabhāskara*. Upaniṣadbrahmayogin reads *viddhati.*

192. Only the last portion of the first line of the quoted verses beginning with *tṛṣṇayā cet sa pātakī* has been identified. It is *Kulārṇava Tantra,* 10.6.

193. This has not been found in Yāska.

194. *Viṣṇupurāṇa,* 6.75.74 with the following emendations: read *vīryasya* for *dharmasya; jñānavairāgyoścaiva* for *jñānavijñāyoścaiva*. Cf. *Śrīviṣṇupurānam,* ed. Sampatkumaracarya (Kanchipuram, India: Grantha-malakaryalaya, 1971).

195. Emend *śārīraghatako* to *śārīraghatakayā vā* following Adyar.

196. The *Nagānanda Sūtra*s are unidentified.

Emend *hṛdayāmūrmiḥ* to *hṛdayāmūrtiḥ* following Adyar.

197. Emend *tādṛśadharmaviśiṣṭha* to *tadṛśadharma-samūhaviśiṣṭha* following Adyar.

198. The explanation seems a bit confused and variant readings offer no immediate solution. In the previous sentence Śiva is the basis (*ādhāra*) and it would follow that He is the substance (*pradhānam*), that is, the qualified (*guṇi*) rather than the quality (*guṇa*). When Śakti is half His body, the idea being the figure of Ardhanārīśvara, She should be the substance (*pradhānam*).

199. Cf. *Saundaryalaharī,* 1.

200. The *Śaktisūtra*s have been unavailable for review.

201. The meaning of the verse quoted is not clear but it is likely to be found in either the *Ṛg* or *Atharva Veda*s; cf. *Ṛg Veda,* 6.44.7 where the word *urūsya* occurs. The intended meaning of *sama,* however, is perfectly clear.

202. Emend *Bhāgavata* to *Devībhāgavata* following Adyar and GOML. The passage has not been located.

203. This has not been located in the *Devībhāgavatam.*

204. Cf. *Setubandha* on the *Yoginīhṛdaya,* 1.10–11.

Emend *viśeṣaḥ* to *vistaraḥ* following Adyar and GOML.

205. Emend *śaktyādhinatvādhilambitam* to *śaktyādinavādisadvilambitam* following Adyar; also emend *śīghraprasiddikāmaiḥ* to *śīghrasiddhikāmaiḥ* following Adyar and GOML.

206. Emend *saguṇadhyānam uktvā* to *saguṇadhyānadvayam uktvā* following GOML 2.

207. *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra,* 10.68.

208. Cf. *Kulārṇava Tantra,* 1ff.

209. Emend to add *suṣuptidaśāyam* after *pratidinam;* also emend *sa* to *saḥ*.

210. Emend *nirvikalpasambandhitvena* to *nirvikalpasamādhitvena.*

211. *Kulārṇava Tantra,* 5.80.

212. *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra,* 1.12.

213. The *Samayācārasmṛti* is unidentified.

The *śautrāmanī* is part of the *soma* sacrifice; see A. B. Keith. *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upaniṣads* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1925, pp. 352–59).

Portions of this quotation occur in *Kulārṇava Tantra;* (B) is *Kulārṇava Tantra,* 5.93 and cd of (C) is 6.31.

214. The source of the verse is unidentified; according to oral traditions it belongs to the *Haṃsamaheśvara Tantra* though no manuscript confirms this fact.

Emend *param* to *varam;* also *pragaccantu* to *prayacchantu* following GOML.

215. Cf. *Tantrarāja Tantra,* 1.82–83. Note that the verse quoted above does not occur in either editions of *Tantrarāja Tantra* or in the *Śaktisaṃgama Tantra.*

216. Cf. Bhāskararāya's commentary following the line *adharmakāraṇam* in *Kaulopaniṣad.* He also refers here to the unidentified *Nagānandasūtras.* See p. 2 of the Avalon edition for details.

Emend *brahmābhave sati kiṃ avaśiṣyate* to *brahmābhave kiṃ avaśiṣyate* following GOML.

217. The source of the verse is unidentified.

In ab of the verse emend *mattaḥ kupyati kopanaḥ* to *mattaḥ kupyanti kopanāḥ;* also in cd emend *kopinaḥ* to *yoginaḥ* following Adyar and GOML.

218. *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra,* 10.82.

219. *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra,* 10.83.

220. See Pāṇini 7.1.39 for the true ending "*e*" as directed by the indicatory letter (*anubandha*) *s.*

221. *Nityāṣoḍaśīkārṇava,* 1.6. Bhāskararāya says here that the devanagari letter *e* can be made to look like a triangle, thus: ए

Furthermore, by the three triangles he means the three major inner triangles that combine to form the *trikoṇa* and *vasukoṇa* sub-*cakras.*

222. Cf. *Ṛg Veda,* 10.71.6; also *akaro vai sarva vak* occurs as *Aitareya Āraṇyaka,* 2.3.6. Śivānanda in his *Ṛjuvimarśinī* on *Nityāṣoḍaśīkārṇava,* 1.26 and again at 1.100, quotes this Vedic passage. The idea is that by hearing *ī* one actually hears the *bījākṣara klīṃ* without the *k* and *l* sounds. Bhāskararāya in the *Setubandha* on *Nityāṣoḍaśīkārṇava,* 1.6 says *a* is Paramaśiva and *i* is Paraśakti and by their combination *e* is produced and that the combination is represented by the central three major triangles of the *śrīcakra.*

223. Emend *carama* to *parama* following Adyar.

224. The *Śivarahasya* is unidentified.

225. The injunction is unidentified.

226. Cf. Pāṇini, 6.1.95.

Glossary

ācāra: "practice," "conduct," "behavior," "custom," "teaching"; like other terms with a similar meaning, when *ācāra* is used in a compound its preceding qualifier indicates its specific sense.

advaita: lit., "nondual"; used to indicate the position of ultimate monism adopted by various schools of Indian thought. The two nondualist schools of particular concern in the present study are the so-called pure nondualists (*kevalādvaita*) led by the eighth-century Śaṅkarācārya and the Śākta Tantrics who might best be termed theistic nondualists. The two schools differ on many technical points but foremost is the contention of the Śāktas that the dualistic material world is not merely a product of ignorance (*avidyā*), since it is a product of the free will of God, nor is divinity itself a subordinate form (i.e., one "with qualities") of the Absolute Brahman. Rather, the Śāktas adopt a position of original unity which transforms itself by its own free will into a real, dualistic universe of names and forms (*nāmarūpa*). Thus Śāktas adopt the position known as *pariṇāmavāda* or the doctrine of transformation, which the *kevalādvaitin*s reject.

ānanda: lit., "bliss"; an attribute of the Absolute Brahman that is given prominence in Śākta Tantrism as a description of realization. In the ultimate form it is said to be an "unqualified bliss" differing from any mundane, conventional experience or description because it is (1) permanent and (2) lacks a recognition by the subject as a particular form of experience limited by sense awareness or mental impressions. *Ānanda* does, however, occur in various levels which are viewed hierarchically; more mundane feelings of pleasure are considered approximations of the experience occurring in the final stages of realization.

antaryāga: lit., "internal sacrifice"; a key concept in both Kaula and Samaya interpretations of Śrīvidyā and in Tantrism in general, *antaryāga* refers to the process by which all forms of overt action are made mental, contemplative acts.

adhikāra: lit., "qualification"; any individual undertaking a Tantric spiritual discipline is rated by the guru according to ability, personal temperament, capacity to learn. The guru then responds with teachings deemed appropriate to the "qualification" of the student.

ardhahakāra: lit., "half the letter 'h' "; an obscure and technical term in Tantrism used to indicate the female organ both literally and symbolically as it is made a part of ritual and meditative practice.

āvāraṇa: lit., "obstruction"; used in Śrīvidyā in the compound *navāvāraṇa* or nine obstructions to indicate the nine passages or stages in the *śrīcakra* that are identified with the nine sub-cakras. The idea is that each *āvāraṇa* is overcome by ascending stages of ritual and contemplation as the adept moves towards the goal of union symbolized in the *bindu* at the center of the *śrīcakra*.

bahiryāga: lit., "external sacrifice"; any type of ritual, performance, verbal or mental effort which involves material elements and explicit actions taken as part of the spiritual discipline. In Śrīvidyā, forms of *bahiryāga* are said to be transformed into "internal sacrifice" (*antaryāga*) in a gradual process of ritual assimilation and contemplative practice.

bhāṣya: lit., "commentary"; any written or verbal commentary on texts or oral teachings. A variation of this word, *bhāṣya,* is used in the compound *sandhābhāṣa* or "twilight language." This purposefully metaphorical, shadowy language, prominent in Buddhist texts, is used to conceal and encode Tantric materials in order to prevent their use or comprehension by noninitiates. It is not favored by Hindu Tantrics, who prefer a technical vocabulary that frequently uses common words with very specific meanings.

bhakti: lit., "loving devotion"; one of the most common and important concepts in Hinduism. In general bhakti refers to the reciprocal relationship of love, friendship, and reliance existing between a devotee and a divinity. In the case of Śrīvidyā, *bhakti* plays a central role in virtually all forms of ritual expression and as a key element in personal faith.

bhūprasatāra: lit., "spread over the earth"; the term refers specifically to the two-dimensional form of the *śrīcakra* either as it is written in a temporary form on the earth or on some other object, or as it is inscribed on some more permanent substance such as a sheet of five metals (*pañcalokam*).

bindu: lit., "drop"; in the most specific and common sense of the term, *bindu* refers to the central point within the *śrīcakra* symbolizing the nondual nature of the union of Śiva and Śakti. It can also refer to semen in esoteric discussions of certain ritual performances practiced by Kaula adepts.

daksiṇācāra: lit., "right (-hand) practice"; as Lakṣmīdhara understands it, this term indicates Tantric practices which do not employ any ordinarily prohibited substances, such as the *pañcamakāras,* or promote any form of worship that may lead to a breach in the conventional standards of orthodoxy associated with high-caste behavior. This is the "popular" sense of the term though it is not universally accepted; Bhāskararāya, for example, rejects this meaning (perhaps because as a Vaidika Tantric he did not feel himself outside the orthodox fold and yet did not feel constrained by these prohibitions) and suggests the difference between the so-called "right-" and "left-handed" practices is based on a technical understanding of different levels of spiritual awareness.

darśana: or *darśan,* lit., "sight"; refers to the practice of coming within the view of any respected figure including within view of an image or god. *Darśan* has been treated elsewhere (see reference to Diana L. Eck in Bibliography), but key to our understanding is that a *darśan* is an exchange of glances, both a "seeing" and a "being seen."

deśācāra: lit., "custom of the region"; an especially important concept for understanding the ways in which Śrīvidyā manifests itself in particular places by adepts and is assimilated into local culture. Many of the practices common to Śrīvidyā in a particular area are without a Sanskritic or pan-Indian basis and thus indicate the influence of local or regional factors.

dhyānaśloka: lit., "meditation verse"; these poetic verses describe the physical and sometimes metaphysical characteristics of particular aspects of Hindu divinities. They are the centerpiece of meditative efforts and are usually associated with particular mantric aspects of a god as well. The most common of the dhyānaślokas of Lalitā Mahātripurasundarī has been given in chapter 3.

dīkṣā: lit., "initiation"; the necessary first step in any Tantric spiritual discipline is to gain access to teaching through a qualified teacher (i.e., one with three generations of lineage) and thus any instruction within this formal relationship can be considered part of the initiation process. *Dīkṣā* itself usually refers to the specific giving of mantras that officially recognize the participation of an individual within a lineage of teachings and teachers.

dīkṣānāma: lit., "initiated name"; a special name given at initiation into the Śrīvidyā mantra that becomes the spiritual identity of an individual in the capacity of being a qualified adept. Many historical figures in Śrīvidyā tradition are known only by their *dīkṣānāmas* rather than by their given names. While the concept is adopted into Śrīvidyā from an ancient and common Vedic practice, all the *dīkṣānāmas* in Śrīvidyā end with the epithet *-ānandanātha* (lit., "blissful lord") though the *-nātha* portion is sometimes dropped. See *PKS,* 1.40 where this is specified. The tradition continues up to the present, though in some lineages *dīkṣānāmas* are considered optional and may not be given.

dvija: lit., "twice-born"; refers to any member of the upper three estates (the so-called *traivarṇikas*) of ancient Aryan society because of a rite of passage in which they receive a form of Vedic initiation. Though the particular ritual is limited to males, the term applies to both genders of these castes. In contemporary Tamil Nadu the term effectively applies only to brahmans. One of Tantrism's major characteristics is that it does not limit access to initiation on the basis of a "twice-born" birth.

gāyatrī: in general, a Vedic meter of twenty-four syllables but specifically the name of a mantra which is actually a verse from the *Ṛg Veda* (3.62.10) and considered the most sacred of all Vedic utterances. On the structure of this verse is built any number of other *gāyatrīs* for other divinities; a common practice among Tantrics and especially prevalent with respect to mantras ascribed to local aspects of divinity.

hādi: lit., "beginning with *ha*"; the term used for the so-called Lopāmudrā tradition and the specific version of the Śrīvidyā mantra associated with it. Though there is some controversy over the exact form of the mantra there is a consensus that it begins with the syllable *ha. Hādi* as a tradition of ritual worship is represented by such important historical writers as Śivānanda, Puṇyānanda, Amṛtānanda, among others. See Brooks, "Śrīvidyā," 1987 for details.

iṣṭadevata: lit., "the desired (or chosen) deity"; namely that specific aspect of a deity favored by an individual and singled out as representative of the general concept. Thus, at one level, Lalitā Mahātripurasundarī is the *iṣṭadevatā* of Śrīvidyā tradition inasmuch as she represents the chosen form of the supreme Śakti. But each Śrīvidyā adept may identify a local goddess, such as Madurai Mīnākṣī, as their own *iṣṭadevatā* and hence take that version to represent both Lalitā and Paraśakti.

jñāna: lit., "knowledge"; in Śrīvidyā, as in other nondualist schools, *jñāna* is the liberative insight one gains through spiritual discipline in which the individual soul (*ātman*) is seen as identical to the Absolute.

kādi: lit., "beginning with *ka*"; the Śrīvidyā mantra in its most popular form begins either its fifteen- or sixteen-syllable form with *ka*. This is the so-called Kāmarāja or Manmatha tradition in which the mantra's form was fixed and passed in a lineage descending from Śiva in his Kāmarāja aspect.

kailāsa: the name of the mountain home of Śiva and Kubera but represented in Śrīvidyā by the three-dimensional form of the *śrīcakra*. Thus any three-dimensional *śrīcakra* is sometimes called a *kailāsa* cakra. More specifically, a partially elongated three-dimensional *śrīcakra* is called a *kailāsa cakra* in contrast to the full three-dimensional figure known as as *meru cakra*.

kalā: lit., "aspect," "part," "bit," "digit of the moon"; used in a number of ways in Śākta Tantrism, the basic sense relates to the division of the phases of the moon into sixteen portions. These sixteen aspects are identified with various other parts of the *śrīcakra,* the human body, and the universe.

kāmakalā (dhyāna): lit., "(meditation) on the aspect of desire"; a technical reference to a complex form of meditation in which the female organ becomes literally or figuratively the center of ritual attentions. This is a central part of the Kaula tradition's worship and is performed in order to emphasize the overcoming and restraint of sensual pleasures and the proximate bliss of sexual relations in relation to the final realization of the Absolute. Samaya and other conservative elements within Śrīvidyā reject this form of meditation either completely or in any external form (i.e., as a *bahiryāga*).

khaḍgamālā: lit., "the garland of the sword"; actually a list of the names of the various deities of the *śrīcakra* in the order of their identification that is recited as a contemplative act of devotion or as a substitute for more elaborate forms of *śrīcakra* worship. The recital of the *khadgamālā* is one of the most popular forms of worship in contemporary traditions. It takes its name from the sword symbolizing the goddess's power to strike down desire, hatred, and delusion; the names themselves are strung together like flowers on a garland.

kuladevata: lit., "the deity of the *kula* (or family)"; this is the particular aspect of divinity favored within specific groups—all designated by the encompassing term "kula." Thus one of the names for Śrīvidyā is *Śrīkula,* and the *kuladevatā* is Lalitā Mahātripurasundarī; it may also refer to a particular family's chosen deity or the traditional deity associated with the village of their origin.

kuṇḍalinī: lit., "winding," "spiral"; the esoteric term used to refer to the latent spiritual power envisioned in the form of a snake wound three times about the center (*mūlādhāra cakra*) at the base of the spine. In the processes of *kuṇḍalinī* yoga this power, identified with Śakti, gradually rises up the central channel (i.e., the main *nāḍī* called the *suṣumṇā*) of the body (located in the region of the spine) and passes through six (or in Śrīvidyā, nine) particular centers called *cakras*. Upon reaching the uppermost center (though technically not a *cakra*) the *sahasradalapadma,* literally the thousand-petalled lotus, *kuṇḍalinī* is said to be fully extended and hence in perfect union with Śiva, who resides at the pericap of the skull. This esoteric physiology partly explains the various levels of spiritual and material achievement associated with continuing yogic practice and links physical forms of practice with mental couterparts.

kūṭa: lit., "peak"; used in Śrīvidyā to refer to the three portions or "peaks" of the Śrīvidyā mantra.

madya: lit., "wine"; one of the five prohibited substances, that is, one of the *pañcamakāras* or *mapañcakas.* Used as a part of Tantric ritual, wine is intended to approximate the feeling of well-being that is associated with the final bliss of realization. As any intoxication, ritual or otherwise, deliberately violates the norms of high-caste behavior, the use of wine thus distinguishes this ritual practice as a "higher qualification" according to its proponents, the Kaula Tantrics.

madhyamā: lit., "the middle"; in Tantrism this term is used technically to indicate the second stage in the devolution of sound from its primordial source. Creation is viewed as a product of Brahman in the form of sound and thus *madhyamā* refers to that stage in which sound is in the stage of meta-language but is in nearly every respect considered pre-articulate. Mantras are considered the only emanation of this stage of sound to be articulated in a physical form.

maithuna: lit., "sexual intercourse"; the fifth and most controversial of the *pañcamakāras* or five prohibited substances. Many Tantric schools, including elements within Śrīvidyā, advocated ritual sexual intercourse as an enactment of the union of Śiva and Śakti. In many cases the wife of the adept is worshiped as the goddess with the culmination of worship being copulation; in other cases, intercourse with women not known is preferred. Though accepted and even advocated by a number of contemporary lineages, the practice of the fifth *makāra* is seen to be extremely limited in South India. Many conservative lineages either reject its appropriateness outright or claim that the superior qualification required for its practice is no longer found.

māṃsa: lit., "meat"; the second of the *pañcamakāras,* the ritual ingestion of meat in violation of the usual standards of Hindu orthodoxy is another aspect of Tantrism's deliberate efforts to go beyond the limits of ordinary convention in order to bring about a sudden and radical personal transformation.

mantraśāstra: lit., "treatises (or teachings) on mantras"; the body of literature and teachings that list, codify, and explain the use and formulation of mantras. Śrīvidyā adepts have gained renown for their knowledge and mastery of the *mantraśāstra.*

mata: lit., "conviction," "tradition," "school," "doctrine"; one of many terms indicating these meanings (others include *ācāra, sampradāya, mārga, krānta,* etc.), *mata* is usually attached to the terms *kādi* and *hādi* in order to indicate the particular mantric teachings associated with each. In this case, however, it does not seem the term carries with it the notion of a "school" as it does when used in the compounds, *Śrīmata* or *Kālīmata.* As we have observed, the key issue is not which general term is used as the second member of a compound but rather which specific term is used to govern it.

maṭha: lit., "school of learning," "monastery," "ascetic's dwelling"; used specifically with reference to the two prominent centers of the Śāṅkara tradition in South India, namely, at Kāñcipuram in Tamil Nadu and at Śṛṅgeri in Karnataka.

matsya: lit., "fish"; another of the five prohibited substances (*pañcamakāras*) used during certain Kaula rituals including Kaula forms of *śrīcakra pūjā.*

meru: sometimes, *sumeru,* is the name of the bejewelled mountain at the center of the universe around which all the planets revolve. In Śrīvidyā tradition it is identified with the *śrīcakra* in its three-dimensional form, thus the term *meru cakra* is used to indicate the three-dimensional *śrīcakra* and identifies it with Mount Meru.

mūlamantra: lit., "root-mantra"; every particular deity in each of its aspects has a mantra (or mantras) identified with its final or ultimate subtle (*sūkṣma*) nature. Often the term is used to indicate the highest form of a deity and the particular mantra identified with that form. In the case of Śrīvidyā tradition the root-mantra of Lalitā is either the fifteen-syllable mantra known as the *pañcadaśī* or *pañcadaśākṣarī* (in one of its twelve forms, including the popular *kādi* and *hādi* versions) or the sixteen-syllable mantra known as *ṣoḍaśī* or *ṣoḍaśākṣarī*.

mudrā: lit., "seal," "stamp," "gesture"; one of the important ritual elements of Tantrism, *mudrās* are usually hand gestures which invoke, symbolize, and "seal" a relationship between the person performing them and the divinity. Each *mudrā's* significance is multivalent while the actual form can differ according to interpretation. In Śrīvidyā there are nine specific *mudrās* shown before each of the nine sub-cakras (and identified with them as aspects of the presiding deities) and one *mudrā* meant to encompass the others or represent the supreme aspect of the goddess, namely, the *trikhaṇḍa mudrā*.

mudrā: lit., "fermented or parched grain"; one of the five prohibited substances (*pañcamakāras*) used in Kaula-influenced Tantric rituals. Various grains are used in preparations that cause them to ferment and thus have an intoxicating effect.

naivedya: any offering of food, cooked or otherwise, presented to a deity, usually at the conclusion of ritual worship.

nibandha: lit., "binding," "compendium," "ritual handbook"; one of the two terms (the other is *paddhati*) used to indicate the ritual codification of a particular lineage or tradition and to supply, as it were, the liturgy for all occasions. One of the most famous is the *Nityotsava* of Umānandanātha, which codifies and presents the ritual formulas suggested by the *Paraśurāma Kalpasūtra*. In Śrīvidyā tradition, Umānanda is known by the title *nibandhakāra,* the "composer of the handbook." *Nibandhas* and *paddhatis* are unpretentious, straightforward compendia with little elaboration or explanation accompanying the text. The intentions of the work are clear only to those with an insider's knowledge of the practical aspects of the tradition but they are revealing of at least the theoretical dimensions of a lineage's interpretations. As in many liturgies however, there is room for interpretation, interpolation, and revision, thus the *nibandhas* are not in themselves perfect reflections of the actual practice of a particular group or lineage.

nityā (f.): lit., "eternal," "permanent"; in Śrīvidyā the term *nityā* is identified with the sixteen deities who embody the phases of the moon and thus the days of the fortnight. They are identical to the so-called *tithis* or the sixteen *kalās* but specifically refer to the deities identified with each of these days or aspects of the moon.

nyāsa: lit., "laying down," "placing," "imprinting," "interidentifying"; a process characteristic of Tantric ritual in which sounds, usually in the form of seed-syllables (*bījākṣaras*), are identified with parts of the human body, deities, and yantras in order to form a series of microcosmic/macrocosmic relationships.

paddhati: see *nibandha.*

pañcadaśī: lit., "fifteen," sometimes *pañcadaśākṣarī,* "fifteen syllables"; one of the root-mantras (*mūlamantra*) of Lalitā in her supreme form. The mantra itself is usually not uttered aloud and thus the term is used to specify the mantra without violating its sanctity. The syllables are called *akṣaras,* that is, "indestructible," because they are believed to be aspects of the deity in the subtle (*sūkṣma*) form and thus reduced, as it were, to their most primary level. See *kādi, hādi,* and *mūlamantra* above for further details.

pañcamakāra: lit., "the five m's," sometimes *mapañcaka;* the so-called five prohibited substances and activities that characterize Kaula-influenced Tantric ritual. They are so-called because each term begins with the Sanskrit letter *m,* thus: *madya* (wine), *māṃsa* (meat), *matsya* (fish), *mudrā* (fermented grain), and *maithuna* (sexual intercourse). See each term for further remarks.

parā: lit., "transcendent," "supreme"; here taken with a feminine ending to indicte the goddess in her supreme aspect, namely, in the form of the *śrīcakra.*

paramparā: lit., "one following another," "succession," "lineage"; unlike any of the other terms indicating "tradition," *paramparā* specifically indicates a lineage, that is, the succession of tradition from guru to student. There are, in effect, as many lineages as there are teachers though many are bound together in various types of relationships. The core of any Tantric tradition is found only in the *paramparās* since it is at this level that generalities are worked into specifics and teachings of the oral tradition are formulated and passed on.

paraśakti: lit., "supreme *Śakti* or goddess"; the general term used to designate the goddess in her highest aspect, that is, in a position of fundamental superiority encompassing even her consort Śiva. Śāktas do not discount the role of the male consort since he is viewed as a necessary component in the theological scheme. In Śrīvidyā the preferred form of *paraśakti* is Lalitā Mahātripurasundarī though other names are occasionally used and local beneficent aspects are equally identified with this central figure.

paśyantī: the first, pre-articulated aspect of sound as it emanates from its primordial source of Brahman. This concept plays an important role in understanding how Tantrics view the devolution of the universe from a single source as a parallel sound manifestation. See *madhyamā* and *vaikharī* for further details on the theory.

pīṭha: lit., "seat," "throne"; indicating a center of a tradition and the individual who at the present time sits upon this seat of authority, i.e., the *pīṭhācārya,* or "teacher of the tradition." Used specifically in the present study to designate the Śāṅkara tradition's two major centers in South India at Kāñcipuram and Śṛṅgeri, each of which has a traditional succession of teachers who take the title "Śaṅkarācārya" in order to establish their lineage relationship with the eighth-century Śaṅkarācārya.

prakāśa: lit., "illumination," "manifestation"; technically used in Tantric discussions to distinguish Śiva's fundamental quality of "pure illuminative being" from Śakti's "reflective being" (*vimarśa*). Metaphysically, Śiva is considered insentient, eternal, and hence, the purely "illuminative" source of creation while Śakti is the active and dynamic "self-reflection" of that one reality (identified as Brahman). It also refers to the Self (*ātman*) before devolving by karma and ignorance (*avidyā*) into a self-conscious, dualistic entity standing in relation to other objects, that is, the Self *before* it "reflects" (*vimarśa*) upon itself as such.

praṇava: the sacred syllable *auṃ.*

pratinidhi: lit., "representative," "substitute"; in Tantrism a *pratinidhi* is any element prescribed to be used as a representative or substitute for another. This is the common method employed for overcoming the social and practical difficulties associated with the five prohibited substances. It is usually clear, however, that just any substitute is not acceptable and in many cases lists of alternatives are given. Thus in the case of wine prescribed to be drunk at a certain point in the *śrīcakra pūjā,* a concoction of milk, honey, and spices is substituted as the *pratinidhi.*

pratyabhijñā: lit., "recognition"; refers to an important doctrine, propounded in a number of Tantric schools and especially by the great Kashmiri philosopher Abhinavagupta. The doctrine of recognition maintains that the final realization of the godhead is, in fact, a re-cognition, that is, an insight into the ontological fact of primordial unity between the Absolute and the soul which pre-exists one's own realization of it. Realization of the godhead is therefore nothing new but an awareness of what is already the case.

prayoga: lit., "use," "application," "scheme," "prescription"; the term is used in many ways to indicate some method or form of practice or procedure to be followed in ritual, meditation, or in other situations. The important case in Śrīvidyā is the use, i.e., the *prayogas* associated with the first forty-one verses of the *Saudaryalaharī* as mantras, accompanied by prescriptions regarding the use of various mantras, offerings, and other procedures.

pūjā: lit., "worship," "honor," "adoration," "ritual"; the most common term designating worship of any kind in Hinduism.

śabda: lit., "sound"; indicating any sound from the most subtle emanation of the primordial absolute, that is, the so-called *śabdabrahman,* to the most manifest and vulgar.

sādhana: lit., "accomplishing," "performing," "attainment," "discipline"; the term used to designate the particular spiritual, physical, and mental discipline prescribed and implemented according to traditional teachings and following the instructions of a guru. *Sādhana* refers to both the forms of practice and the accomplishment of the discipline. See *siddhi* and *siddha.*

śaiva: a devotee of the male divinity, Śiva. Most Śāktas, that is, devotees of a female divinity, are also part of Śaiva traditions and make no absolute distinction between Śākta practices and theology and Śaiva traditions. The difference is more of emphasis than of strict sectarianism. There are Śāktas within Vaiṣṇava traditions (certain Pāñcarātrins, for example) but these form a minority within the general Śākta Tantra traditions.

samaya: lit., "rule of conduct," "compact," "custom," "convention," "order," "precept"; used in both a general and specific sense within Śākta traditions and especially after the fifteenth-century Lakṣmīdhara codified the so-called Samaya Śrīvidyā tradition in order to rid it of such Kaula influences as the ritual use of the *pañcamakāras.*

saṃhārakrama: lit., "destruction method," "deconstruction perspective"; the manner of envisioning the *śrīcakra* or ritually worshiping it in which the adept begins with the outermost portions of the diagram and methodically moves towards the central *bindu.* It is called "destructive" or "deconstructive" because in the interpretation of the *śrīcakra* as the symbol and form of the universe the process of reuniting with the Absolute (i.e., achieving unity with Śiva and Śakti) the adept "destroys" the misconceptions of the dualistic world and "dismantles" any sense of separation from the Absolute.

sampradāya: lit., "tradition," "school," "doctrine," "handed down instruction"; the most general term used to designate the concept of a traditional teaching. Śrīvidyā is sometimes called Saubhāgya Sampradāya because it is the tradition which focuses upon and elaborates the concepts surrounding the "beneficent" or "prosperous" (*saubhāgya*) aspect of the goddess. The term is sometimes used in more specific contexts with more narrow meanings to indicate the particular lineage of instruction, that is, the *paramparā* within the broader tradition (such as Śrīvidyā). Thus an adept might be asked, "What is your *sampradāya?*" meaning to what lineage of Śrīvidyā (or any other tradition) do you belong? The general sense of the term, however, allows the adept a greater flexibility and discretion in answering such a question.

Śaṅkarācārya: The eighth-century theologian whose interpretations of the major sources of Vedānta tradition are termed the "pure nondualist doctrine" (*kevalādvaitavāda*) because of the unequivocal position that ultimately the Absolute Brahman is qualityless (*nirguṇa*) and perfectly identical to the individual soul (*ātman*). Śaṅkarācārya (or Śaṅkara, as he is called, the term *ācārya* designating "teacher" or "the master") maintained that theism was a useful and sometimes necessary means of qualifying the Absolute with qualities (*saguṇa*) in order to effectively teach its transcendent identity with the soul. This position met with much opposition within Hindu traditions. Historically, he is said to be responsible for the spread of his interpretations by having established centers of learning (*maṭhas*) throughout India and in the southern region at Śṛṅgeri in Karnataka. According to the traditions of the *maṭha* at Kāñcipuram, Śaṅkara settled there after having "conquered the directions" (*digvijaya,* the term used to describe his preaching across the length and breadth of India) and composed his Śākta treatises and commentaries. In variance from the established Śaiva/Śākta traditions in the *maṭhas*, Hacker and other scholars have clearly demonstrated that Śaṅkara could not (or is very unlikely to) have composed these Śākta works. It seems also clear, however, that Śaiva/Śākta, and specifically Śrīvidyā, influences entered into the *maṭha* traditions sometime after the eighth century (and before the eleventh century) and that it is likely that one of the heirs of the Śāṅkara tradition composed these works and attributed them to the master. These disputes have never reached a satisfactory historical conclusion. From at least the fifteenth century, Śaṅkara is clearly identified with Śrīvidyā tradition and the contemporary Śāṅkara *maṭhas* in both North and South India support the belief that he was a Śrīvidyā adept (but not solely a Śrīvidyā worshiper). Bhāskararāya and other Śrīvidyā adepts do not distinguish Śaṅkara who authored the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* and other strictly *advaitic* works from the Śākta-oriented Śaṅkara who penned *Saundaryalaharī,* though they are also not particularly interested in the former. The most common designation of Śaṅkara by Śrīvidyā is simply by the epithet "Bhagavatpāda," that is, the "feet of the Lord," used to indicate their respect and admiration for him.

saubhāgya: lit., "good fortune," "prosperity," "auspiciousness," "blessedness," "grace"; the term within Śrīvidyā tradition is generally applied to the beneficent (*saumya*) aspects of the goddess but also to the effects of the practice of the tradition's spiritual disciplines.

saumya: lit., "charming," "placid," "gentle," "beneficent"; used to refer to the so-called *aghora* or "nonfearful" or "not terrifying" aspects of Hindu gods, specifically with

Śrīvidyā it refers to the gentle and beneficent aspects of the goddess Lalitā Mahātripurasundarī, contrasting to the *ghora* or fearful Kālī or Durgā.

siddha: lit., "accomplished," "adept"; the term is used generally to designate any spiritually accomplished Tantric adept, that is, one who has obtained special insight or powers (*siddhis*); it may also suggest the traditions of rather eccentric, unpredictable adepts, such as the Tamil saint Tirumūlar, saints whose legends and writings reflect the extraordinary abilities attributed to them.

smārta: lit., "followers of the *smṛtis* or recollected scriptures"; the term is applied to the brahman castes which draw their essentially Śaiva/Śākta traditions from the so-called *smṛti* body of literature and focus on the "*smārta* series" of divinities, namely, Śiva, Visnu, Śakti (usually designated by the name Durgā but encompassing all feminine aspects), Gaṇeśa (or Gaṇapati, the elephant-headed eldest son of Śiva and Śakti) and the Vedic deity Sūrya, the Sun-god. They are distinguished in Tamil Nadu from other Śaiva-oriented brahmans who function as priests (the so-called *adiśaivas*) and sectarian Vaiṣṇava brahmans.

ṣoḍaśī: lit., "sixteen," "sixteen-year-old girl"; also "sixteen syllables or parts," referring in Śrīvidyā to both the goddess in her youthful form and to a form of the *mūlamantra* of the tradition consisting of sixteen syllables or parts. The controversy over the construction of the mantra leads one to conclude that it is an elaboration of the fifteen-syllable form of the *śrīvidyā* since the *ṣoḍaśī* occurs in both a strict sixteen-syllable form (the so-called "light" or "lesser" *ṣoḍaśī*) and a more elaborate "great" form (*mahāṣoḍaśī*) consisting of two sets of syllables appended to the fifteen-syllable *kādi śrīvidyā*.

sṛṣṭikrama: lit., "creation method," "constructuve perspective"; the method of envisioning and worshiping the *śrīcakra* beginning with the innermost *bindu* and proceeding in an outward direction through the triangles, lotus petals, and outer gateways.

sthūla: lit., "gross," "physical"; used in Tantrism to refer to the physical, anthropomorphic images of deities and to suggest that these forms are "vulgar" in comparison to mantras (the subtle or *sūkṣma* forms) or yantras (the transcendent forms).

sūkṣma: lit., "subtle," "refined," "precise"; the mantric aspects of deities are referred to as their "subtle" (*sūkṣma*) forms because they are considered hierarchically superior to the physical, anthropomorphic aspects. Bhāskararāya refines this notion in his discussion of the Śrīvidyā mantra.

tattva: lit., "reality," "fact," "metaphysical category," "that-ness"; according to Śâkta Tantrism, the categories of the constituent elements of the material world, called *tattvas,* number thirty-six. This concept of categorizing the fundamental material and mental substances is adopted and expanded upon from the Sāṅkhya and Yoga systems and perhaps from earlier Kashmiri Śaiva discussions. See *HT,* pp.52f. for a complete list and discussion.

traivarṇika: lit., "three estates"; see *dvija,* which has the identical meaning.

trikoṇa: lit., "three sides," "triangle"; any triangle may be designated by the term *trikoṇa;* however, in Śrīvidyā the term is frequently used in the specific sense to designate the innermost triangle of the *śrīcakra,* that is the *sarvānandamayacakra*.

twice-born: see *dvija*.

upacāra: lit., "service," "worship," "offering," "requisite articles"; in the specific sense of Tantric ritual, *upacāra* refers to the presentation of various substances such as flowers, food, sandlewood paste, *kuṃkum* powder, and other auspicious articles near the conclusion of external worship (i.e., during *pūjā* or *bahiryāga*). These vary in number and follow differing prescriptions according to lineage traditions. According to *PKS* there are sixty-four prescribed *upacāras*. The *naivedya* or food offerings are a separate part of the formal *pūjā* but are generally considered under this term.

upāsana: lit., "sitting near," "worshiping," "attending," "spiritual discipline"; the term is multivalent since it suggests both loving devotion (*bhakti*) and concentrative awareness directed towards a particular deity following a specified spiritual practice (prescribed by the guru). Thus it has both a specific sense and a more general one suggesting any form of worship or devotion. The literal meaning of the term is useful in understanding its Tantric sense: the devotee or adept (i.e., the *upāsaka*) by "sitting beside" the deity draws closer to its nature through various acts of spiritual discipline. So long as a sense of distinction remains between adept and deity then the term aptly applies to the relationship of "proximity" that is suggested by it literally.

vaikharī: lit., "speech," "articulated speech"; a technical term used to indicate the third and final phase of the devolution of the Absolute Brahman in the form of sound (i.e., *śabdabrahman*); *vaikharī* when taken with *paśyantī* and *madhyamā* forms the essential triad that explains the gradual formation of the material world. All ordinary forms of language and articulated sound fall into this third category.

vasukoṇa: lit., "bejewelled triangles," "eight triangles"; the term *vasu* in this compound has the esoteric meaning of "eight"; thus the compound refers to the first set of eight minor triangles of the *śrīcakra* following the innermost triangle (or *trikoṇa*).

vidyā: lit., "knowledge," "science," "mantra"; another term with many different usages depending upon the context, *vidyā* refers to both mundane and spiritual (i.e., liberative) types of knowledge. But in Śākta Tantrism it is technically used to indicate mantras, especially mantras of female deities. Thus *śrīvidyā* refers to the "knowledge of Śrī (the goddess)," "auspicious knowledge," and specifically the embodiment of that knowledge in the form of the mantra called the *śrīvidyā*.

vamācāra: lit., "left(-handed) practice"; in the ordinary sense *vamācāra* is used to designate those Kaula-influenced traditions of Tantrism which prescribe and employ ritually certain esoteric elements, such as the *pañcamakāras* and *kāmakalādhyāna*, that seemingly defy the conventions and standards of brāhmaṇical orthodoxy. It contrasts with the so-called "right-handed practice" (*dakṣiṇācāra*) which conforms to the usual expectations of brāhmaṇical society. Śrīvidyā tradition has had both types of practice and no small amount of heated debate concerning the appropriateness and stature of each.

vimarśa: lit., "refection," "thought," "deliberation"; technically used to indicate the fundamental attribute of Śakti within Śaiva/Śākta Tantric theology, *vimarśa* refers to Śakti at the very first moment of self-reflection, that is, as the emergence of self-awareness as such. Since the Self (*ātman*) is eternal and absolutely identical with the primordial, absolute Brahman its ultimate nature is that of nondualistic, nonreflective "illumination" (*prakāśa*, the attribute of Śiva). However, when the One devolves from its original, pristine condition its first "act" as such is self-cognition of itself—this is identified with Śakti as "reflection" (*vimarśa*).

vṛttatraya: lit., "three circles"; according to the majority of Śrīvidyā interpreters the *vṛttatraya* refers to the three outer circles surrounding the set of sixteen lotus petals on the *Śrīcakra*. Bhāskararāya differs from this interpretation and claims the three circles are those that separate the sets of triangles from the lotus petals. His position, it would appear, is based on the ritual interpretation of the *śrīcakra* as an utterly purposeful diagram, and since Bhāskararāya sees no ritual place for the three circles as surrounding the lotus petals he reinterprets the ordinary accepted placement of these circles. The issue is important insofar as this technical point allows the observer to evaluate historical and contemporary followers of Bhāskararāya as authentically interpreting his views as well as shedding further light on the ritual use and construction of the *śrīcakra*.

yoginī: lit., "female attendant," "female yogi"; technically used within Śrīvidyā to designate the attendant deities of Śakti as they preside (on her behalf) over various parts of the *Śrīcakra*. The *yoginīs* are, in fact, merely aspects of Śakti embodying specific powers, principles, and concepts which are identified with the adept's own spiritual nature and material achievements.

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Religion / Asian Studies

The esoteric Hindu traditions of Tantrism have profoundly influenced the development of Indian thought and civilization. Emerging from elements of yoga and wisdom traditions, shamanism, alchemy, eroticism, and folklore, Tantrism began to affect brahmanical Hinduism in the ninth century. Nevertheless, Tantrism and its key historical figures have been ignored by scholars. This accessible work introduces the concepts and practices of Hindu Śākta Tantrism to all those interested in Hinduism and the comparative study of religion.

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The University of Chicago Press

The goddess Rājarājeśvarī as Prāṇaśakti Devī. Image provided by the Shri Rajarajeswari Peetham of Rochester, New York. Photo by Adam Epstein.

ISBN 0-226-07570-2

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